

**CONFIRMATION AS A LIFELONG CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM:
THEOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL PROPOSALS TOWARD A
HOLISTIC MODEL**

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**by
Thomas Kenneth Johnson**

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Thomas Kenneth Johnson,

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Faculty Committee

Mary Elizabeth Mullins Moore

Ray H. Ryden

April 10, 1946
Date

Harold L. Linder
Dean

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Abstract

Confirmation as a Lifelong Celebration of Baptism:

Theological and Educational Proposals Toward a

Holistic Model

By

Thomas Kenneth Johnson

Through a complex array of historical developments the practice of confirmation has been reduced from a lifelong affirmation of baptism for the whole community to a one time, private graduation affair exclusively for the individual involved.

This project is an effort to expand the current understanding of confirmation so it can be practiced as ongoing celebration of baptism. To accomplish this, a holistic model is proposed which promotes confirmation as an educational and pastoral ministry inclusive of the faith community through-out the full life cycle. The aim is to construct a confirmation practice, with a theology grounded in the daily affirmation of baptismal grace and an educational design supportive of relational, cooperative and interactive learning.

The particular focus of this project is confirmation practices within the Lutheran Church.

Emphasis is given to the particular historical developments that have shaped confirmation as it is practiced today. The recent Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1993) is reviewed in light of this project's proposals. The purpose is to integrate the report's recommendations of adapting a more holistic approach to confirmation ministry into possible curriculum designs which will be accepted and practiced within congregations.

The research and proposals developed by Robert Browning and Roy Reed have been helpful in formulating this study. A confirmation inventory, developed by Browning and Reed, has been adapted to examine how Lutheran clergy (specifically in Southern California) respond to the proposal of a lifelong, age-inclusive model, reforming confirmation to include repeatable baptismal affirmation opportunities.

In conclusion, three possible curriculum designs are offered to implement confirmation as a lifelong learning venture and an ongoing renewal of commitment to claiming and celebrating our baptismal ministry.

Acknowledgments

Through this project, I am living proof of "life-long learning." For this precious gift I wish to thank those who made learning such a joy for me, my committee members, Dr. Mary Elizabeth Moore and Dr. Roger Roghan. Their supportive attitude of mutual learning has enriched my baptismal vocation of ministry and my whole life.

For the gift of giving me the inspiration and opportunity for this project, I wish to thank my wife Mary. Her faithful love and encouragement have been an affirmation of baptismal grace.

For the gift of reminding me that there are more important things than this project, I thank my children, Nathaniel and Annalisa. Their smiles and hugs truly confirm the joy of the baptized life.

For the gift of being able to affirm and celebrate the life-long blessing of being a child of God, I thank the Creator Spirit, now and forever.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Problem Addressed by the Project

The meaning and practice of confirmation, both as a theological proposition and as an educational ministry, has had a history of confusion. Because of a lack of clarity over its purpose, confirmation has become traditionally understood as a rite of passage relegated to adolescents, a mandatory program of indoctrination, a privatized venture of making an intellectual ascent to faith, and a one time social event that often leads persons to feel they have graduated from the church rather than being strengthened in their baptismal commitment. The purpose of this project is to address the problem of narrow and limited approaches to confirmation, and the impact of these approaches on curriculum design. The aim is to explore a wider and more inclusive pedagogy which can unlock the promise of confirmation as a life-long educational ministry for the whole church.

Importance of the Problem

Current research indicates that almost every major church denomination is undergoing study and discussion concerning the endeavor of confirmation ministry.¹

¹ Robert L. Browning and Roy A. Reed, Models of Confirmation and Baptismal Affirmation (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1995). See Chap. 5, "Findings from a Study of Seven Denominations," 77-108.

Considerable creative energy is employed in discerning the purpose of confirmation and in designing models of educational curriculum and liturgical formats that promote a broader, more dynamic understanding of confirmation as an holistic ministry, sensitive to the needs of all who might be involved.

Further research indicates that participation in confirmation, as practiced today, does not ensure that people will have enthusiasm for life-long learning and life-long commitment to the ministry of the church upon its completion. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has the highest percentage of its young people involved in the church precisely when it offers confirmation, but a tremendous drop occurs immediately after the concluding ceremony.²

Confirmation, especially as a pastoral and educational ministry, offers the vital opportunity for the development of faith and spiritual maturity, and for realizing our baptismal vocation of service to the world. It also offers a way to enhance and nourish participation and commitment to the Christian community and its mission. The challenge, however, is to discover and implement models which communicate and sustain the presence and potency of God's Word, Spirit and grace as an ongoing process of renewal and recommitment, rather than just a singular event. The need

² Peter Benson and Carolyn Eklin, Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1990).

is also for an overview of current proposals and concrete examples as to whether or not such proposals can be actualized as designs for curriculum within the parish setting. While some argue that the time has come to eliminate confirmation altogether,³ most call for its reform in order to move beyond an individualistic, one time program of indoctrination, detached from the issues of the wider world, and seen exclusively for certain age groups.⁴

Thesis

If confirmation is to continue as a vital pastoral and educational ministry, a theology which embraces a constant affirmation of baptismal grace and a relational approach to education must be constructed. The history of research suggests the need to reform confirmation into a life-long learning venture, which is inclusive of the whole community and the world, dynamic and relational in both its approach and content.⁵ In spite of this evidence, a very limited

³ Stephen Goodwin and Lewis Groce, "What are We Confirming?" Currents in Theology and Mission 22 (1995): 209. They call for an elimination of the currently practiced form: "It is past time to abandon the current confused practice referred to as 'confirmation.' We do more harm than good. By allowing this historical mutation to remain untreated, we facilitate its insidious growth.... It is too late for preventive medicine; we need radical surgery" (p.209).

⁴ See The Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1993).

⁵ Looking primarily at the Lutheran Church, these concerns are raised repeatedly in Arthur C. Repp, Confirmation in the Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964); W. Kent Gilbert, ed., Confirmation and Education (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969); Frank W. Klos, Confirmation and First Communion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1968); and E.L.C.A., Confirmation Ministry Task Force.

number of curriculum resource designs are actually available to facilitate these criteria. This project explores various educational and theological rationale for expanding the meaning and practice of confirmation as a repeatable sacramental event, grounded in baptismal affirmation and the vocation of ministry. Specific models are examined as possible embodiments of this expanded understanding of confirmation, and proposals are made regarding the purpose and practice of confirmation ministry.

Methodology

My approach in this project will include a historical review of various models of confirmation, an analysis of current theological and educational trends, and empirical research taken from a survey of Lutheran clergy and laity.

Proposals toward a holistic model of confirmation ministry will be shaped by the findings of these various studies and the responses of those currently in the teaching role, e.g., pastors and lay educators.

Definitions of Major Terms

Confirmation

Confirmation is not an easy term to define because it has a history of meaning many things depending upon the circumstances of the one offering the definition. Over the centuries it has been referred to as chrism, or the "seal of the Spirit," baptismal renewal, affirmation of baptism, and

blessing of recommitment. Considerable debate still continues over whether confirmation is a sacrament or a "sacramental ceremony" (as Luther maintained). The definition that has guided the Lutheran church for over twenty years was recently re-examined by the 1993 Task Force Report. By omitting a few key words significant changes were proposed.

Confirmation ministry is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church that helps the baptized (children) through Word and Sacrament to identify more deeply with the (adult) Christian community and participate more fully in its mission (and celebrated through a public rite).⁶

From these changes a focal question was identified:

What is the role of the congregation in affirming youth in Christian faithfulness with an emphasis on lifelong learning and discipleship?⁷

Certainly, this is an important question if confirmation is to serve the entire faith community as a way to re-affirm the baptismal grace which is meant to strengthen and sustain us throughout our lives.

In light of this recent history, the working definition of confirmation in this project is: A lifelong pastoral and educational ministry of the church which strengthens the baptized for participation within the Christian community and it's mission to the world.

Sacrament

Once again, sacrament is a term that has been defined differently according to tradition and perspective. The Roman

⁶ Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report, 1.

⁷ Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report, 1.

Catholic and Anglican traditions uphold eight sacraments: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, marriage, reconciliation, ordination, consecration of laity for ministry, and healing and wholeness in life and death.⁸ In most Protestant circles, including the Lutheran Church, only baptism and Eucharist are considered sacraments. As Luther concluded, confirmation can not be a sacrament in the strictest sense, for Christ did not command it as a rite to which he attached the promise of salvation and God's grace.⁹ Today, some Protestant scholars are calling for a redefinition of the nature of sacrament, which could influence how we perceive confirmation. Robert Browning and Roy Reed particularly critique a "substantialistic understanding where God's grace is imparted and withheld by those who have the power to channel that spiritual power," and they advocate for a "relational view which sees God's grace present in the world and interpersonally in the church in the dynamic of a loving, caring, forgiving, justice-seeking body of Christ."¹⁰

Drawing from these reflections, sacrament is defined in this project as the means by which God imparts grace into the world. This understanding of sacrament will be examined in light of a confirmation theology which embraces God's

⁸ Browning and Reed, 24. They also include the "forgotten sacrament of servanthood, footwashing."

⁹ Theodore R. Jungkuntz, Confirmation and the Charismata (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1983), 45.

¹⁰ Browning and Reed, 24-25. They further maintain: "Confirmation can stand as a sacrament, which, like Eucharist, can and should be repeated when the faith of the person is tested, stretched, and matured as experiences of life unfold" (p. 25).

presence throughout the world and throughout one's life cycle.

Dynamic Interplay between God's Word,

Spirit and Grace

Both the educational and liturgical process in confirmation is to reflect and promote the interactive and changing relationship evident in God's Word. I have chosen these three theological components because they are at the heart of the Reformation movement, through which any Lutheran perspective of confirmation must be formulated. Based upon Reformation principles, confirmation is a strengthening of the Spirit through the Word and Sacraments in order to live a grace-filled life. Theological definitions for Word, Spirit, and grace are obviously numerous, however this project will draw primarily from Luther's radical notion that all three are interdependent and yet grounded in the incarnate Christ.¹¹ In this project the interrelationship of Word, Spirit, and grace will be drawn upon to shape a confirmation curriculum which is inclusive and engaging of all the stages of life.

Baptism

If a primary definition of confirmation is to be an affirmation of baptism, then a definition of baptism is also needed. Currently, within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in

¹¹ Regin Prenter, Spiritus Creator, trans. John M. Jensen (Philadelphia: Muhlenburg Press, 1953). See in particular chap. 2 (101-72), which outlines Luther's view that the Word is the means of the Holy Spirit to make Christ present to us (108-09).

America a study is being conducted entitled The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament with Commentary. The study team affirms that "Baptism is a sign and testimony of God's grace, awakening and creating faith....In Holy Baptism God gives us new birth, adopts as children, and makes us members of the body of Christ, the Church."¹² This statement makes it clear that "baptism includes instruction and nurture in the faith for a life of discipleship."¹³ The team further affirms the possibility of a repeatable affirmation of baptism: "The public rite for Affirmation of Baptism may be used at many times in the life of a baptized Christian. It is especially appropriate at confirmation and at times of reception or restoration into membership."¹⁴

In this project, baptism is defined as God's action of grace to give us a new identity as a member of Christ's body and faith-filled disciples of Christ's ministry. My proposal is, thus, to broaden the understanding of baptismal instruction and affirmation to include regular opportunities for the entire church community to affirm their baptism throughout the various stages or seasons of faith and life.

Work Previously Done in the Field

Over the past thirty years, scholarship on the question of confirmation has dramatically increased. From the Lutheran

¹² The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament with Commentary (Chicago: E.L.C.A., 1995), 9.

¹³ Use of the Means of Grace, 10.

¹⁴ Use of the Means of Grace, 14.

perspective, Arthur C. Repp's landmark book Confirmation in the Lutheran Church (1964) sparked a tremendous response, and a Joint Commission of the American Lutheran Church, The Lutheran Church of America, and the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod was formed to present an in-depth study, which was completed in 1968. In conjunction with this study, an academic dialogue was offered in Confirmation and Education (1969), edited by Kent W. Gilbert. Further, a study on the Commission report was produced for congregations, a book by Frank W. Klos entitled Confirmation and First Communion (1968).

One major shift in thinking within these works was that confirmation should not be a prerequisite for admission to first communion. Also put forth was the position that confirmation is not to be seen as a completion of baptism and that baptism, not confirmation, is the essential means of becoming a full member within the church community.¹⁵ In essence, confirmation was seen as a pastoral and educational ministry that helps youth identify with and participate in the mission and life of the Christian community. The focus throughout these works remains on adolescents, and considerable discussion was focused on the appropriate age for confirmation. Still, some hints were offered that perhaps confirmation should be seen as a life-long process and that

¹⁵ Klos, 140-49, offers an excellent summary of this position.

the whole community should be involved in a relational mode of both learning and teaching.¹⁶

The works surrounding the study report of 1968 served as major resources until the recent Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report in 1993. In conjunction with this report, two additional resources have been developed by Ken Smith, Associate Director for Christian Education, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, "to enrich congregational conversation regarding confirmation ministry."¹⁷ In addition five major curriculum designs have been developed. These offer a variety in approach for confirmation geared to an adolescent age group, but does not envision possible new directions, such as an intergenerational, lifelong program which emphasizes interaction with the whole community.¹⁸ Still, the concerns raised by these current works highlight the need to reform confirmation through a more holistic approach, inclusive of the entire church community in offering opportunities for baptismal renewal at all the various stages of life.¹⁹

¹⁶ See Klos, 208, who cites "The Report of the Joint Commission on the Theology and Practice of Confirmation," which says, "Major attention should be given to helping the confirmand become involved in a lifelong concern for his [sic] Christian education instead of viewing confirmation as a terminus to learning."

¹⁷ Ken Smith, Tools for Teaching Confirmation: Ritual Pattern, Intentional Project, Shaped Human Conversation, Shared Experiences; and Six Models for Confirmation Ministry (Chicago: E.L.C.A., Division for Congregational Ministries, 1993).

¹⁸ The curriculum are Creative Confirmations, Living in Grace, Affirm Series, New Journeys in Confirmation, and The Living Catechism (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994).

¹⁹ Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report, 12.

In respect to traditions outside of the Lutheran Church, a large volume of research has been compiled in the last twenty years. Some of the more influential works include:

(1) from an Anglican perspective, Confirmation The Celebration of Maturity in Christ by Urban Holmes, and Building God's People by John Westerhoff III; (2) from a Roman Catholic standpoint, the work of Aidan Kavanagh, most recently Confirmation: Origins and Reform; (3) from a Presbyterian viewpoint, Journeys of Faith: Confirming and Commissioning Young Members of the Church; (4) from a United Methodist perspective, By Water and the Spirit, emphasizing the interrelationship between baptism and confirmation.²⁰ Other scholarly works helpful in understanding the complexity of historical developments include the work of Paul Turner, Theodore Jungkuntz, and Gerald Austin.²¹

This study will also critique recent proposals for developing practical designs for confirmation as an educational ministry. The book Becoming and Belonging edited by William Myers is an excellent example of this.²² Also, a

²⁰ Urban T. Holmes, Confirmation: The Celebration of Maturity in Christ (New York: Seabury, 1975.); John Westerhoff, III, Building God's People in a Materialistic Society (New York: Seabury, 1983.); Aidan Kavanagh, Confirmation: Origins and Reform (New York: Pueblo, 1988.); Journeys of Faith: Confirming and Commissioning Young Members of the Church (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing House, 1990); and By Water and the Spirit: An United Methodist Understanding of Baptism (Nashville: General Board of Discipleship, 1993).

²¹ Paul Turner, The Meaning and Practice of Confirmation (New York: Peter Lang, 1987.); Turner, Confirmation: The Baby in Solomon's Court (New York: Paulist, 1993); Jungkuntz, Confirmation and the Charismata; and Gerard Austin, The Rite of Confirmation (New York: Pueblo, 1985).

²² William R. Myers, ed. Belonging and Becoming (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1993).

very engaging relational approach has been developed by Rich Melheim, who is currently conducting workshops for congregations under the title "Conformation (sic) is Dead."²³ These efforts highlight major new currents of Christian education reform, sparked by the work of Thomas Groome, Maria Harris, Parker Palmer, James Fowler, Jerome Berryman, Mary Elizabeth Moore, and Richard Osmer, to mention only a few.

Finally, the most notable work to address the question of confirmation is Models of Confirmation and Baptismal Affirmation by Robert Browning and Roy Reed (1995). This volume provides current research on the practice of Christian churches, an excellent summary of both educational and liturgical trends, and specific designs for practicing confirmation or affirmation of baptism as a repeatable event that encompasses all ages from infancy to older adulthood. The problem remains, however, as to how one is able to translate their findings and suggestions into actual curriculum designs that might be embraced and employed at the congregational level. This will be the primary scope of this project.

Scope and Limitations of the Project

This project focuses on how to develop confirmation curriculum which supports confirmation as a repeatable, life-long sacramental process of affirming baptism at various stages along the life cycle of faith and commitment. The

²³ Rich Melheim, "Conformation is Dead" seminar, 201 E. Burlington, Stillwater, Minn. 55082, 612/430-0762.

intention is to offer models that are dynamic and Spirit-filled, inspiring community interaction and involvement, and stressing a relational approach that is inclusive of all participants.

As a Lutheran pastor who has personally struggled with this issue for over twelve years, my concern is shaped primarily by the need to develop curriculum as it relates to the Lutheran practice of confirmation. I have agonized over the common drop-off rate that occurs after confirmation is supposedly "completed." I have also searched for creative ways to initiate and educate those persons who are completely new to the Lutheran tradition and those who have experienced the need for an ongoing, holistic opportunity for affirming or renewing their baptismal faith. My interest in curriculum design was also influenced by serving as Dean of a Confirmation Camp program for eight years and having the responsibility for creating a dynamic educational program that integrated traditions of the church with the present challenge of being in relationship with other people, the earth, and God as an interdependent community.

Although issues concerning the purpose and practice of confirmation are multiple, especially when considering its complex history, this project will be limited to the question of how the developing understanding of confirmation as a lifelong, relational process can be "worked out

systematically in life and liturgy," especially as a vital pastoral and educational ministry.²⁴

Procedure for Integration

As noted above, many innovative proposals are being offered today concerning the future of confirmation. These proposals need to be evaluated to determine how appropriate they are to the theological and educational rationale for confirmation ministry. Specific examples of these proposals will be examined and critiqued in this project. The research of Browning and Reed, and the survey which they used, will be employed to evaluate the responses of clergy and laity, especially within the Lutheran church, to the specific proposals of broadening the practice of confirmation. In all of this, special attention will be given to how current theological and educational concepts influence the process of designing curriculum for confirmation.

Chapter Outline

In this first chapter the focus has been on introducing the thesis and approach of the work. The remainder of the project is designed to build upon the thesis that confirmation ministry needs a holistic approach in order to become a lifelong celebration of baptism.

Chapter 2 presents a brief overview of the historical context regarding the purpose of confirmation and how theological and educational concerns have shaped curriculum

²⁴ Browning and Reed, 102.

designs. A comparison is made to current trends and proposals. Careful attention is given to the work by Browning and Reed, Arthur Repp, Frank Klos, Ken Smith and various Lutheran Reports on confirmation ministry.

Chapter 3 is an examination of the theology of confirmation in relation to baptism, identity, vocation or ministry, community, and mission. Also included here is a discussion regarding the sacramental nature of confirmation and whether it should be considered as a repeatable event. Furthermore, proposals for how a relational understanding of Word, Spirit and grace forms a theological rationale for confirmation as a life-long educational ministry are explored.

Chapter 4 reviews and evaluates educational proposals for making confirmation inclusive of the whole community and a lifelong venture, in contrast to the traditional approach. Various trends in the education field and their influence on confirmation is discussed. A variety of possible alternative models of confirmation ministry are considered. This includes a cooperative/community-based approach, a family centered and intergenerational program, mission and service oriented programs, and an approach which incorporates the various needs and interests of the community, i.e., cultural, age and life-style concerns, life transitions or stages of faith.

Chapter 5 is the review of an ~~empirical~~ research survey, focusing particularly on the responses given by Lutheran clergy and laity to the proposal of making confirmation

ministry an ongoing opportunity to strengthen the role of baptism and commitment.

Chapter 6 contains a summary of my findings and final reflections upon the proposals that have been introduced regarding the future of confirmation ministry.

Chapter 7 dicusses implementation of the prosposed model and suggests three possible examples of confirmation curriculum for various dimensions of the church community.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Historical Understandings and Practices

Baptism and Confirmation

When we talk about confirmation our conversation is really about baptism; when we are dealing with baptism we are discoursing about Christian initiation; when we are into initiation we are face to face with conversion in Jesus Christ dead and rising; and when we are in conversion in Jesus Christ dead and rising we are at the storm center of the universe.

Aidan Kavanagh¹

This dramatic appraisal of the significant link between confirmation and baptism prepares us for the entanglement and complexity in attempts to trace the historical origins and later developments of confirmation. Paul Turner says that "confirmation has the embarrassing distinction of being the one rite about which people keep asking 'just what does it mean,'" and he cautions that any effort to discern the correct meaning and practice of confirmation is a "venture into a desert of mirages."²

Throughout the history of confirmation, basic questions have persisted: Is confirmation for adults or children or

¹ Quoted in Murphy Center for Liturgical Research, Made, Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 2.

² Turner, Meaning and Practice of Confirmation, 1-3.

both? Is it a beginning, initiation rite or a conclusion to post-baptismal instruction? Does it represent a one-time seal of the Spirit or an ongoing strengthening of the Spirit's power? Should it be emphasized as a free gift of the Spirit, as a communal event with community participation or as a ritual focused on an individual's faith and commitment?

According to Arthur Repp, the Lutheran tradition has only the name "confirmation" in common with the early church. The actual practice and purpose of confirmation has developed over the centuries into a completely new entity. In this respect, any modern day reconstruction of confirmation must be in tune with an understanding of the means of grace, namely the Gospel and the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. From a Lutheran perspective, the function and goal of confirmation should be determined from the Reformation emphasis upon God's grace and its relationship to the Word and Spirit.³ Here, historical evidence clearly supports the claim that confirmation originates and flows out of the sacrament of baptism.

No direct mention of confirmation can be found in New Testament writings, at least not as a separate theological construct or practice. Rather, the earliest references are imbedded in a unified initiation rite of baptism in the third century. Drawing from Tertullian's tract On the Resurrection of the Body, near the end of the second century, and the

³ Repp, 9.

Apostolic Tradition attributed to Hippolytus in the early third century, the whole instructional-liturgical initiation rite contained various parts, e.g., baptizing, anointing, sealing, the laying on of hands, admission to the Lord's supper, but still the rite reflected one unified sacramental act.⁴

Not until the French Councils of Riez and Orange in 439 and 441 do we actually have the term "confirmation" being used to describe the episcopal act of confirming baptisms by the bishop. This included laying on hands and using oil (chrism) for anointing. The Eastern Othodox church developed the practice of allowing priests to baptize fully using a chrism (oil) which the bishop had blessed, while the Western Roman church allowed the priest to conduct the water baptism, but reserved the laying on of hands and anointing for the bishop, hence "confirming" and completing the baptism. This took place depending upon availability of the bishop's scheduled visits.⁵ Around 460, Bishop Faustus of Riez preached on the significance of this episcopal confirmation, claiming that those who received it were more fully Christian. This was the first time confirmation was presented as an additional strengthening of the Holy Spirit over and against the gift bestowed at baptism.⁶ This understanding of confirmation had an immense influence upon shaping a new

⁴ Repp, 13-14. Also see Klos, 36-38.

⁵ Goodwin and Groce, 206. Also see Browning and Reed, 9-10.

⁶ Browning and Reed, 10.

model that became an extension or an expansion of baptism as an independent post-baptismal ritual.

Confirmation as an Expansion of Baptism

In the Western Roman church, the practice of episcopal confirmation gradually spread, and theological explanations to justify it began to surface. As a more hierarchical structure of the church became formalized, so did the notion that "confirmation had a greater dignity and power than baptism because it was administered by a minister with a higher ecclesiastical office."⁷

By the Middle Ages confirmation was seen less as a Spirit gift of strengthening integral to the ongoing significance of baptism and more as an expanded ritual necessary for the approval of an individual's commitment of faith. The communal nature of baptism and the authority of the community to participate fully in an ongoing process of baptismal affirmation and renewal was subtly undermined by this theological justification to separate confirmation from baptism. Scholars suggest that these developments are due a variety of factors; the schism between East and West, the need to fight heresies and establish ways for the recent adult convert to verify their faithfulness, and to legitimize the authority of papal supremacy.⁸ Eventually, as the Roman church also began to postpone admission to communion and to add an instructional component, the significance of

⁷ Browning and Reed, 10.

⁸ See Klos, 39-43; Browning and Reed, 10-11; Repp, 14-15; and Holmes, 34-40,

confirmation grew from merely an expansion of baptism to a separate, independent rite. Theologically it came to be considered a necessary rite to complete or fulfill the initial event of baptism.

Confirmation as a Separate Sacrament

In the twelfth century, Peter Lombard relied upon these earlier theological developments to justify further the practice of confirmation as "the perfection of baptism."⁹ Near the end of his life he became an archbishop and in 1150 he wrote that baptism gave grace for forgiveness of sin but that confirmation through the bishop gave strengthening and perfection for the Christian life.¹⁰ This perspective remained influential to the scholastic theologians, especially Thomas Aquinas, who associated the fullness of the Spirit for Christian living with confirmation. In his work, Summa Theologia, confirmation was now elevated to a sacrament, distinctive from the rite of baptism.¹¹ However, many disagreed, raising serious concerns over the scriptural authority for confirmation and the lack of evidence for any uniform practice to follow.¹² Gradually the meaning and practice of confirmation evolved away from baptism and led to the official canonization of confirmation as a separate sacrament at the Council of

⁹ Klos, 43; and Browning and Reed, 10.

¹⁰ Klos, 43.

¹¹ Klos, 43. See Thomas Aquinas, Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas, trans. and ed. by Alan M. Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954).

¹² Browning and Reed, 11.

Florence in 1439, when Eugene IV issued the papal decree, "ProArmensis."¹³ For some this implied that confirmation was more important than baptism because the bishop did it and because a greater gift of the Holy Spirit was bestowed. But others saw it as an opportunity to establish a program of educational instruction. Within this context the Reformation movement began and offered a variety of responses to the issue of developing a meaningful practice of confirmation.

The Reformation's Response

Two major influences which shifted the liturgical role of confirmation to more of an educational endeavor were the Bohemian Brethren (1468) and Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536).¹⁴

The former perceived confirmation as a way to affirm baptism personally at a later, mature age. To do this, further instruction consistent to the faith confessed at baptism was required. Then, the student could be examined to determine if they had accepted the Christian faith and asked publicly to confess their intention to remain faithful to promises made at baptism. From there they would be ready to be "confirmed" with the laying on of hands, and they would receive the prayers of the congregation for the strength to remain faithful. At this point the confirmand

¹³ Repp, 14.

¹⁴ Bohemian Brethren, Deutsche Katechismen der Bohimischen Bruder [German catechism of the Bohemian Brethren], ed. Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinendorf (New York: Olms, 1982). Also see Jungkuntz, 36-37.

would be acknowledged as a full member within the church and be admitted to the Lord's Table.

Erasmus took this approach even a step further when he urged for a renewal of the baptismal vow as an obligation for all who have been baptized. He saw the age of puberty as an opportune time when the rite of baptism should be "re-enacted," not in the sense of repetition, but as a personal dedication to the vows once spoken at baptism.¹⁵ To accomplish this, Erasmus advocated for a thorough educational program to prepare the child to make a profession of allegiance to Christ and the church. This approach addressed the thorny problem of needing a counterbalance to infant baptism and a conscious decision to accept the obligations of discipleship. As one scholar summarizes:

Erasmus tried to shift the emphasis in the prevailing doctrine of confirmation from God's gifts to man's obligations to appropriate those gifts, from liturgical rites to catechetical processes.¹⁶

Because of his contributions, Erasmus is considered to be the founder of catechetical confirmation. He gave birth to a new model that continues to shape our understanding of confirmation.¹⁷

Martin Luther, although interested in the development of catechetical instruction, was strongly against any

¹⁵ Erasmus, Desiderius. The Praise of Folly, trans. Clarence H. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). Also see Jungkuntz, 37.

¹⁶ Klos, 49.

¹⁷ Repp, 20; and Klos, 49.

notion that confirmation was necessary to complete baptism. Luther's views regarding confirmation are limited; however it is clear that he did not regard it as a sacrament commanded by Christ, to which the "promises of salvation are attached," such as baptism and Holy Communion.¹⁸ In a sermon in 1522, Luther voiced concern that confirmation must not become another form of sacramental legalism undermining the graciousness of God's gifts in baptism. Luther could support confirmation "as long as it is understood that God knows nothing of it, and has said nothing about it and that what the bishops claim for it is untrue."¹⁹

Luther saw confirmation as a "sacramental ceremony....[like] other ceremonies such as the blessing of water and the like."²⁰ This was a departure from the evolved Roman conception of confirmation as a separate sacrament. Instead, this position re-embraced the practice of the laying on of hands and the use of chrism as an integral component of baptism without the requirement of episcopal participation or completion. Baptism, according to Luther, had no need of a bishop to confirm what God has accomplished.²¹

¹⁸ See "The Babylonian Captivity" in Luther's Works, ed. Hulmet T. Lehman, American Ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962), 36:82, 122. Also, see Jungkuntz, 45-48.

¹⁹ See "The Estate of Marriage" in Luther's Works, 45: 24-25.

²⁰ See Luther's Works, 36:92.

²¹ Goodwin and Groce, 207.

At the same time, Luther did support the educational value of the Erasmus model, particularly the development of faith between a child's baptism and the time when they are admitted to the Lord's Table. For Luther, catechetical education become a means to link these two sacraments together and to keep the Word alive on a daily basis.²² This is reflected in Luther's Small and Large Catechisms, which were written for the purpose of preparation for Holy Communion and for the ongoing instruction of all Christians, at all ages. In his preface to the Large Catechism Luther calls for a life-long process of education:

let all Christians exercise themselves in the catechism daily, and constantly put it into practice....let them continue to read and teach, learn and meditate and ponder. Let them never stop until they have proved by experience that they have taught the Devil to death and have become wiser than God himself and all his saints....To this end may God grant his grace! Amen.²³

Luther himself did not advocate for a separate rite, as much as the need for a daily affirmation of baptism. However, other reformers, namely Martin Bucer, Philipp Melanchthon, Johannes Bugenhagen and Martin Chemnitz, took special interest in developing a formalized practice of confirmation according to Protestant standards. Luther offered his lukewarm support, remaining ever cautious about

²² Klos, 51; and Repp, 18-20.

²³ "Luther's Large Catechism," in the Book of Concord, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 361.

regulating its meaning or practice.²⁴ Experiments to develop an evangelical rite increased and so did the varieties of confirmation. This led to the complex traditions and practices we find in our current view of confirmation.

In order to sort through this maze, Arthur Repp has organized various types or patterns of confirmation, from the Reformation to the nineteenth century, into four helpful categories.²⁵

1. Catechetical. This was really a prototype of confirmation for it was more of an instructional program for admission to the Lord's Supper than a process culminating with a church rite. Here, the influence of Luther and Bugenhagen is predominant. Education was seen as a way to acknowledge fully one's baptismal faith before receiving the sacrament of Communion. However, even after being admitted to the Lord's Supper children and adults were expected to continue in their catechetical studies. As one scholar points out:

Luther saw this program as an integral part of the church's pastoral and educational ministry to its people....Luther's idea of the lifelong educative process was taking hold. There never was a graduation ceremony short of eternity.²⁶

The emphasis here was upon instruction, confession of faith and the prayers of the church. No formalized rites were associated with this approach until the nineteenth century.

²⁴ Klos, 55.

²⁵ Repp, 21-96. Also see an excellent summary of Repp's categories in Klos, 55-73; and Jungkuntz, 47-74.

²⁶ Klos, 57.

The catechetical model was widely accepted throughout Scandinavia, due primarily to Luther's father-confessor Johannes Bugenhagen, who left Wittengberg to establish the Reformation in Denmark.

2. Hierarchical. This type of confirmation is also known as the church discipline model since it emphasized two elements that were both disciplinary in nature: a surrender to Christ in the form of a confession of faith and a vow of obedience to the church. This approach is attributed to Martin Bucer, who is considered the Father of Lutheran confirmation. Bucer, in 1538, wanted to respond to the Anabaptist charges that Lutherans did not urge personal commitment and lacked an emphasis on moral discipline within the church. Bucer's confirmation model was "developed as a polemical device" to answer these charges.²⁷ To him, confirmation gave the opportunity for a vow of loyalty to be confessed after a period of instruction and public examination. This confession of faith was to be followed by the laying on of hands, thus redefining the ancient custom from a Protestant view. In summary,

Bucer combined the pedagogical and ethical concerns of Erasmus with the theological and pastoral concerns of Luther, introducing a public vow wherein the child pledged to surrender to Christ and to submit to the discipline of the Christian congregation.²⁸

²⁷ Martin Bucer, Instruction in Christian Love, 1523, trans. Paul Traugott Fuhrmann (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1953). Also see Repp, 28-31.

²⁸ Jungkuntz, 47.

Bucer was also the first to implement the rite of confirmation as a formal ceremony for admission to Holy Communion. He made both confirmation and first communion twin goals of catechetical instruction and in doing so "he went far beyond Luther's understanding that these are but way stations in a lifelong catechumenate."²⁸ As we shall see, the hierarchical type has greatly influenced our modern understanding and practice of confirmation as a one time public rite of passage.

3. Sacramental. This model took Bucer's revived notion of the laying on of hands, and the influence of the Roman church, to interpret that the confirmation rite signified a fuller presence of the Holy Spirit and a fuller sense of church membership for those who were confirmed. This promoted once again the idea that confirmation, and specifically the blessing of the Holy Spirit, completed baptism, contrary to Luther's position. In the development of the Anglican perspective of confirmation, via Thomas Crammer (1489-1556), evidence of the sacramental model's influence is present in the formalized rite for reception of the Spirit's power.²⁹ This approach did not exist independent of itself, but was merged into the other models to sanction a greater significance to the rite of confirmation and the role of full church membership.

²⁸ Klos, 60.

²⁹ Jungkuntz, 48.

4. Traditional. This type emerged from the desire to maintain the medieval practice without betraying the evangelical principles. This approach was characterized by Philipp Melancthon's work Loci Communes (1543). Here, Melancthon suggests three components: examination in the catechism, public confession of faith, and an intercessory consecration of the confirmands accompanied by the laying on of hands, although as a sacramental act. Melancthon maintained that confirmation should not be linked to first communion and that any notion of confirmation as a completion of baptism should be rejected. Melancthon's model received Luther's approval.³⁰

Another important figure was Martin Chemnitz (1522-86), who is known as the principle co-author of the Formula of Concord. Chemnitz attempted to develop a new confirmation rite to meld Luther's stress on baptism and the ancient custom of the laying on of hands in a Protestant sense of blessing. He advocated for a view of remembering or affirming the covenant of baptism rather than renewing or completing it. From Chemnitz, the most complete confirmation rite from the sixteenth century is produced: remembrance of baptism (God's action in the baptismal covenant), personal confession of faith, examination in the catechism, admonition to remain faithful, admonition to remain true to the baptismal covenant, and public prayer of

³⁰ Philipp Melancthon, Loci Communes, trans. by Jacob Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1992), 141-42. Also see Klos, 63.

intercession with the laying on of hands.³¹ Chemnitz's stress on a personal confession and on the admonitions laid the groundwork for models of confirmation which followed in the next two centuries, namely Pietism and Rationalism.

Confirmation as a Conversion Experience

In 1675 the German Philipp Spener (1635-1705), and other Pietist leaders, started a movement against the rigid orthodoxy of mainline church groups. The goal was to inspire a true experience and testimony of Christian living. They believed the church should educate children for committed spiritual living and provide a significant public ceremony to express this personal commitment. The catechetical-confirmation process was perceived to be the perfect vehicle for this. According to the Pietist perspective confirmation became an act of renewal. Catechetical training was redesigned to prepare the young person for a momentous conversion experience as they would publicly declare their surrender to Christ.³²

This emphasis upon conversion changed the thrust of confirmation to a more subjective, individual affair rather than the concern of the whole community. The value of baptism was found primarily in the covenant or vow that the Christian needed not only to reaffirm, but renew. Soon, in

³¹ Martin Chemnitz, Examination of the Council of Trent, trans. Fred Kramer, vol.2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1978), 179-216. Also see Klos, 65; and Repp, 52.

³² Philipp Spener, Pia desideria [Pious desires], trans. and ed. by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964). Also see Klos, 67.

Pietist circles the term confirmation was eliminated and replaced by "the renewing of baptismal covenant." Gradually, the significance of baptism diminished, no longer seen as the primary means for full church membership. Instead true Christian living began when one was confirmed. This model also reinforced the notion that admission to Holy Communion required a public confession of faith at confirmation to verify one's sincerity. As Jungkuntz observes, Pietism made a "shift from reappropriation of objectively given sacramental grace to the subjective affirmation of the confirmand's commitment to Christ."³³

The influence of Pietism was clearly evident in early American Lutheranism. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (1711-1787), considered to be one of the patriarchs of Lutheranism in North America, perceived confirmation as an opportunity to awaken faith. He contributed to the 1786 Formula, which served as a guideline for Lutherans in the New World. Confirmation was interpreted as a solemn rite, in which the confirmand was asked a series of questions regarding their confession of faith and asked to renew their baptismal vow while pledging their allegiance to the teachings of the church. This model's emphasis upon a

³³ Jungkuntz, 70.

heartfelt confession reflects the influence of conversion theology prevalent in the Pietist movement.³⁴

Confirmation as an Academic Graduation

The final pattern of confirmation is as an academic graduation. This pattern has been influenced by Rationalism. As a reaction to the emotionalism of Pietism and to the explosion of modern science, Rationalism emphasized an academic approach. The focus was upon providing young people with the ability to defend their faith and the teachings of the church rationally. As a result, "confirmation became a kind of graduation ceremony from the church's rigorous educational program."³⁵ Eventually confirmation coincided with the completion of general schooling and the recognition of adult citizenship. In turn, confirmation became more of a cultural expected rite of passage than a spiritual exercise. Through out Germany the confirmation rite even became compulsory during the nineteenth century. As the rite was tied to economic and civic privileges, confirmation was seen as another birthday celebration and, according to Repp, "become the most important day in a child's life."³⁶ The Rationalism model elevated the role of confirmation to the point that many pastors said that it was superior to baptism, and some

³⁴ Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, trans. by John W. Doberstein and Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1942). Also see Repp, 96-103.

³⁵ Klos, 70.

³⁶ Repp, 78.

even suggested abolishing baptism.³⁷ Fortunately, such proposals left many others uneasy and as the church entered the twentieth century concerns regarding the practice confirmation were being raised.

Confirmation Under Reconsideration

The models above provide illumination toward how confirmation has developed into today's practice. These various patterns are interwoven and constantly influence one another, which is why later attempts to reform confirmation presented such a challenge.

Many American Lutheran scholars in the early twentieth century believed that confirmation was primarily instruction in church doctrine and traditions. The ceremony that followed was only a public recognition of the knowledge which was gained. Emphasis was placed then on writing new catechisms based upon Luther's Small Catechism. Catechisms written by Wilhelm Lohe (1872), J. Micheal Reu (1904), and Joseph Stump (1907) are all examples of this within the Lutheran church. Still, the basic elements of confirmation were being debated. According to Alfred Repp, ten main questions or issues persisted between 1850 and 1950.

1. What does it mean to renew one's baptismal covenant? What is the purpose of the "vow" being made. What exactly is being confirmed? Baptism? Personal Faith? Allegiance to the church?
2. What role does the "confession of faith" play? Is it an objective or subjective process?

³⁷ Klos, 71.

3. How does confirmation affect church membership? And what role does the congregation play?
4. What is the significance of the Laying on of hands? What is confirmation relation to the Holy Spirit?
5. How is confirmation related to church discipline and loyalty to the traditions of the church?
6. What was the role of the examination? Who should conduct it? What was the role of the parents?
7. What was the appropriate age for confirmation? Should it be limited to only one age group?
8. What should the instruction entail? Which catechism should be used?
9. Should confirmation be linked to First Communion?
10. Who does the confirming? God? The pastor as God's servant? The confirmand? The Congregation?³⁸

One major contribution to the debate was made by a German educator, Martin Doerne, with his work Neubau der Konfirmation, which was published in 1936. He proposed a broader understanding of confirmation as a lifelong educational process, constantly providing opportunities to reaffirm and celebrate the promises of baptism. Doerne argued that it should not be linked to preparation for First Communion nor be understood as a renewal of the baptismal covenant. Rather confirmation was a reaffirmation of God's grace in baptism and the ongoing process of sanctification through the Spirit and the Word. Doerne's views were influential on both German and American scholars, especially Arthur Repp, who concluded:

Among other things, Doerne noted that the existing practice of confirmation violated a

³⁸ Repp, 113-32.

number of Biblical principles and therefore worked against its own success. By allowing confirmation at age fourteen to become terminal for the religious instruction of the children the church was failing to keep before the mind of its youth and adults that Christian education, in its broader aspects, has no terminal point. Education, he said, must be continuous throughout life, for God desires continually to sanctify His own more fully. Furthermore, Baptism assumes a lifetime of contrition and repentance, and for this the Holy Spirit is to teach the Christian throughout his [or her] life. The Church must therefore have an aggressive educational program for its youth a long time after they have been confirmed.³⁹

Unfortunately, Doerne's efforts to reform confirmation based upon the Reformation principles of grace, Word and Spirit were deflected by the onset of World War II. However, his influence seemed apparent in the 1954 Report on Confirmation and Confirmation Instruction in the Lutheran Church. The report suggested that a later approach to confirmation, including unchurched adults, was perhaps more conducive to the purpose of confirmation. It concluded with this observation:

With the church reaching out more and more among the unchurched, a large number of the catechumens have had little or no previous instruction in Christianity. In spite of these considerations, most pastors have not made any changes because of the practical problems connected with advancing the age of the catechumen. The threat of possible losses before a later confirmation has been an important factor in preventing change.⁴⁰

³⁹ Repp, 140. See Martin Doerne, Neubau der Konfirmation [Rebuilding confirmation] (Gutersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1936).

⁴⁰ Repp, 148.

As mentioned, Doerne influenced United States scholar Arthur Repp, who in turn made a tremendous impact with his work Confirmation in the Lutheran Church (1964). Repp called for a confirmation program grounded in baptism and promoting a lifelong educational program to reinforce the constant need of nurture and growth for all members of Christ's Body. He recommends:

Instead of postponing confirmation, congregations need to recover the Reformation principle that Christian instruction is to continue after First Communion. Confirmation should not be regarded as a sort of temple curtain beyond which the church need not guide and direct the young Christian through further religious instruction. In fact, as with the force and meaning of Baptism, Christian nurture ends only when the sinner-saint is transformed into a saint of the Church Triumphant. In such a continuing instruction the church assists the Christian in making his [or her] life a coming into his baptism, helping him to appropriate the gifts received in the sacrament.⁴¹

Repp's recommendations are evident in the 1967 Joint Commission on the Theology and Practice of Confirmation, on which he served, and in the two study books that proceeded the Commission's Report, Confirmation and Education (1969), edited by W. Kent Gilbert, and Confirmation and First Communion (1968) by Frank Klos. The major elements for reconsideration and reform included: separating confirmation from first communion (recommending an earlier admission age), and dispelling both the notion that confirmation was a completion of baptism and that full

⁴¹ Repp, 167.

membership happened at confirmation, not baptism. Also, quoting from Repp, the Commission recommended that "the heart of confirmation lies in the instruction of the Word, not in the rite that precedes it....[and that confirmation] is only one step in a lifelong continuum of Christian growth and education."⁴²

Many of these recommendations have promoted change in how confirmation is understood and practiced today according to surveys conducted in the Lutheran Church over the past thirty years. The most recent being the report by The Confirmation Ministry Task Force (1993).⁴³ The most significant has been the separation of confirmation from first communion and the identification of it as "An Affirmation of Baptism" (as presented in the Lutheran Book and Hymnal, 1978), rather than a renewal or reactivation of a baptismal covenant. In spite of these shifts, examples of practicing confirmation as a lifelong celebration of baptism, with opportunities for ongoing educational and liturgical participation for all ages, still seem to be rare. In the latest report by the 1993 Task Force, the study team revisits this concern over how confirmation, as an affirmation of baptism, can "be a lifelong process rather than a once-in-a-life-event." Coupled with this, how can confirmation be a relational program, flexible enough

⁴² Ralph W. Holman and Luther E. Lindberg, "The Present Scene," in Confirmation and Education, ed. W. Kent Gilbert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 18.

⁴³ E.L.C.A., Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report.

to be inclusive and sensitive to the varied ages, maturity, skills, and cultural needs of all people. The Task Force offers four recommendations in response to these concerns over confirmation ministry reform:

1. Congregational confirmation ministry should be Gospel-centered, grace-centered both in content and in approach.
2. That such a confirmation ministry be tailor-made with an emphasis on community building and faith to convey the Gospel in the congregation's particular context.
3. That congregations create, or designate, a confirmation ministry team to give shape and direction to the planning and coordination of a pastoral and educational confirmation ministry.
4. That synods, the church-wide organization, and seminaries be in partnership with congregations in developing a broad variety of support resources, such as materials, networks, and trained leaders for confirmation ministry.⁴⁴

This report does not offer specific models or curriculum designs to support these recommendations. However, Ken Smith, Associate Director for Christian Education, Youth Education and Catechetics in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, has developed two resource guides in response to the Task Force's recommendations. They are Six Models of Confirmation Ministry (Spring 1993) and Tools for Teaching Confirmation (Fall 1993). The former looks at the theological issues surrounding confirmation, while the latter explores educational theories of teaching as related to

⁴⁴ Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report, 13-14.

confirmation. I will return to Smith's insights later on this project.

Another figure who contributed to the reconsideration of confirmation outside of Lutheran circles was Max Thurian in his work Consecration of the Layman. The original edition was published in French and later translated into English in 1963. Thurian, working from an Anglican tradition, proposed confirmation as an integral part of baptism, and believed its purpose was meant to reinforce and revitalize the baptismal ministry of all Christians. Thurian formulated an argument, based on historical, theological, and pastoral data, that confirmation should be practiced as a repeatable, ongoing "consecration event." He actually preferred the term consecration to confirmation but realized that this word was historically associated with ordination.⁴⁵ Through Thurian's work and from the proposals of Martin Doerne, a foundation has been laid to reconsider confirmation in light of new trends and models being explored today.

Current Trends and Models

Through the historical patterns of confirmation the influences which shape many of the current models operating today are better understood. In Browning and Reed's research eight interrelated models have been identified:

⁴⁵ Max Thurian, Consecration of the Layman, trans. W.J. Kerrigan (Baltimore: Helicon, 1963). Also see Browning and Reed, 1.

1. The Sealing of the Holy Spirit within an Unified Initiation rite; symbolized with anointing with oil (chrism) and the laying on of hands, as reflected in the liturgical practices of the ancient church.
2. The completion of Infant Baptism and "Joining" the Church. Common among Protestant churches, making confirmation the climax to full membership.
3. Ratification of Baptism after Intensive Preparation, Examination, Evaluation and Public Commitment. Emphasis upon individual decision for baptismal commitment.
4. Confirmation as "Affirmation of Baptism" or Baptismal Renewal. A special time for experiencing, reflecting on, growing in, and sharing God's grace. Provides context and opportunity to make a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ and commitment to Christian discipleship.
5. Confirmation as a Blessing and Recommitment. Confirmation seen as a meaningful way to extend God's blessing through out one's lifetime and as an affirmation of mutual ministry.
6. Confirmation as a One-time Sacrament which Imprints a Character Uniquely Christian in Terms of One's Identity and Eternal Salvation. The traditional Roman Catholic understanding of confirmation as a sacrament.
7. Confirmation or Affirmation of Baptism as a Repeatable Sacrament. The sacrament is experienced first in the unified initiation rite, and should be repeated according to human needs of reassessment and recommitment through out one's life. This stresses a relational understanding of sacrament, and seen more like the sacrament of Eucharist, repeated as a means of God's strength and grace (this is the model Browning and Reed find most promising).
8. Confirmation as a Rite which Symbolizes and Celebrates "Life in the Spirit," but cannot be

equated with a particular giving or receiving of the Holy Spirit. God does the confirming through the Spirit's calling to vocation/ministry and the human response of faith.⁴⁶

Of the models above, Lutherans seem to rely primarily upon a merging of the Pietist approach (2), the rationalist approach (3), and the traditional approach (4). Browning and Reed point out that since 1979 the Lutheran position has shifted away from confirmation as a public examination and profession of faith to its being more of a celebration of God's grace and an affirmation of baptism. They point out that this shift is reflected in a 1984 Lutheran confirmation curriculum resource guide.

Great care must be taken that confirmation neither implies joining the church nor overshadows baptism. It is an affirmation of baptism, a way of saying "Yes" to baptism. It is not therefore an unrepeatable, once-for-all act but something that can be done at several points in one's life.⁴⁷

My contention, however, is that though confirmation may be perceived in this way, it certainly is not practiced in this way. Confirmation on a whole is still regulated to a rite of passage for adolescents into church membership, and although affirmation of baptism is the focus, the individual confession and commitment model still looms prevalent. However, evidence shows that a majority of clergy today support a lifelong confirmation program and

⁴⁶ Browning and Reed, 12-27.

⁴⁷ Browning and Reed, 17-18, as quoted from the Affirm Planning Guide (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1984), 84-89.

would like to see curriculum designed to offer this as an option (see Chapter 5).

In their most recent work Browning and Reed identify various liturgical (and/or theological) and educational trends which are shaping the changing structure of confirmation. The liturgical trends, according to Browning and Reed include:

1. Ambiguities of the New Testament evidence regarding Christian initiation or the practice of confirmation.
2. Baptism as the real focus for conversion and commitment.
3. Confirmation: part of the baptismal gift.
4. Need for a liturgy of commitment.
5. The Eucharist as the climatic moment of Christian initiation.
6. The communal nature of Christian initiation.
7. The independence of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸

I will examine these liturgical or theological trends in more detail in the next chapter as they relate to and support a more holistic model of confirmation.

The six trends in the field of religious education, as suggested by Browning and Reed, are:

1. The movement from religious education for assent to right beliefs to a religious education that interfaces beliefs and a quest for truth that can be integrated with all of life.
2. Moving from a theory-practice approach to a praxis approach in which theory and practice are in ongoing interaction.
3. The movement beyond a nurture model of religious education toward a faith development perspective.

⁴⁸ Browning and Reed, 30-39.

4. The movement away from schooling as the primary strategy for Christian education toward a congregational or community of faith approach in which schooling in various forms will still have an important place.

5. The movement from a split between liturgy and religious education to an approach which brings liturgy and religious education together as partners.

6. A movement toward the integration of religious education and spirituality.⁴⁹

In Chapter 4, I will explore how these various educational trends both inform and support my proposals for designing curriculum toward a holistic confirmation ministry.

⁴⁹ Browning and Reed, 39-50.

CHAPTER 3

Review of Theological Understandings, Practices and Proposals: A Lutheran Study

Is there such a thing as a theology of confirmation? Some would argue no, since there is no scriptural basis for it and it is not considered a sacrament. Others maintain that the biblical basis for confirmation is found in baptism and reflects our ongoing response to God's grace, Word and Spirit. Another position is that confirmation reveals a contemporary expression of the teaching dimension of the Office of the Word and Sacrament and is a pastoral responsibility of the Church. The purpose of this chapter is to explore possibilities for developing a theological basis for confirmation in light of the historical context presented in the previous chapter.

Affirmation of Baptism or Another Initiation Rite?

The challenge which is most crucial to formulating a theological foundation for affirmation of baptism is to conceptualize the relationship between confirmation and baptism. Is confirmation a secondary initiation rite, which can operate independent of baptism or does it flow out of an affirmation of baptism and remains dependent on baptism as the primary initiation event?

From a historical perspective, we have seen that confirmation originated out of the understanding and the practice of baptism. This position is supported by the recent Lutheran (E.L.C.A.) Confirmation Task Force report:

[Confirmation] flows out of Baptism. It is an implication of Baptism, a ministry to help Christians realize Baptism's gracious benefits: forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and the bestowal of everlasting salvation to all who believe what God has promised, as Luther said in the Small Catechism.¹

What this suggests is that a Lutheran theology of confirmation must be conceived in relation to a theology of baptism. Attempts to make confirmation a separate and independent rite, or sacrament, often coincide with ignoring or downplaying this intimate relationship between baptism and confirmation. Instead, the more we are able to understand what baptism means, the more we will be able to understand what we are affirming in confirmation.

Recent studies interpreting a Lutheran theology of baptism maintain that through baptism God brings us into relationship to Christ and to one another. Through water and the Word, "and our trust in this Word," as Luther wrote in the Small Catechism, God incorporates us into the crucified and risen Christ and his body, which is the Church. Baptism is one of the "means of grace" God's Spirit uses to create faith and renewed relationships of love, forgiveness and commitment. The Spirit uses the proclamation and teaching of the Word and the Sacrament of Holy Communion to create and sustain faithful relationships in all who are baptized. In this regard, "Baptism is the

¹ Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report, 3.

basis for Christian education and nurture, including confirmation ministry."²

Confirmation then is a ministry designed to enable baptized Christians to live out the ongoing significance of their baptism and embrace the promise of God's grace for every season of life. This perspective of baptism is stressed by the Confirmation Ministry Study Team: "Baptism is a lifelong reality, as well as a rite. When the early Christians heard the word baptize, they would think of an everyday action, not primarily a religious ritual."³ Confirmation does not complete baptism nor should it compete in offering something lacking in baptism. Rather, confirmation provides opportunities, both educational and liturgical in nature, to remember and affirm what has been fully accomplished in baptism. Even though baptism is a significant one time event, "our celebration of God's action in baptism is better understood as a life-long process."⁴

The Task Force on Confirmation Ministry identifies four major theological issues related to this life-long process of celebration and affirmation, central to the confirmation program. The first is identity, understanding ourselves in light of our new identity as God's children in

² Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report, 4. See also The Use of the Means of Grace, 9-15.

³ Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report, 4.

⁴ Goodwin and Groce, 208.

baptism, which helps us appreciate other aspects of identity such as ethnic background, gender, class, culture and nationality. The second issue is mission, given by Christ and proclaimed in our baptism, to share the gospel in actions of love and justice. Next is discipleship, the need for ongoing commitment to participate in this mission and in the means of grace to sustain us in faith, hope and love. The final theological concern is one of vocation, responding to the calling we have received in baptism to use our gifts or talents to serve and empower the vision of living by God's grace.⁵

These theological issues are dynamic and reflect the nature of the baptized community as people move from one stage of life to another. The suggestion for another initiation rite to supplement baptism, personalized and regulated to the moment one enters adulthood, undermines the theological richness of baptism as the primary initiation event. An affirmation of baptism celebrates God's inclusive grace rather than our individual confession of it. When seen through the primacy of baptism, all four of the theological issues raised above have a communal dimension. Baptism is not envisioned as a private affair, and likewise, any affirmation of baptism must involve the whole baptized community. From this perspective the confirmation ministry task force concluded:

⁵ Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report, 4-5.

Confirmation is an opportunity for congregations to renew the vision of living by grace, grounded in Baptism....[which] has longlife implications. Through identity with the baptized community, we grow in mission, discipleship, and our vocation in daily life. The congregation, of course, plays a vital role in the ministry.⁶

The view of baptism as the real focus of initiation, conversion and commitment, and confirmation as something integral to the process began at baptism, is being embraced by more and more church denominations today. As Browning and Reed conclude, "There is a growing consensus for the conclusion that whether we consider confirmation a sacrament or not it must be viewed as part of the baptismal gift."⁷

A Spirit Gift of Sanctification or a Rite of Passage?

Luther held that "baptism signifies that the old self and the sinful birth of flesh and blood are to be wholly drowned by the grace of God."⁸ This occurs through the Word of God, as proclaimed with the water; thus Luther maintained that baptism was a "means of God's grace." Luther's emphasis on God's saving grace through faith in God has emphasized the doctrine of justification. However, with this emphasis, the role of the Holy Spirit and the doctrine of sanctification as an ongoing process of baptismal grace has often been obscured, especially in relation to confirmation.

⁶ Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report, 5.

⁷ Browning and Reed, 33.

⁸ Martin Luther, "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism," in Luther's Works, 35: 29.

From the earliest church traditions, the Spirit gift of strengthening was signified in the laying on of hands and anointing with oil. This was connected to baptism as a way to further convey the Spirit's presence and confirming the action of God's saving grace. Browning and Reed point out that this tradition came from a scriptural understanding of the Spirit and Christian identity: "If we heed the New Testament evidence, and if we understand initiation in Christian faith as marked by baptism, then baptism, in the nature of the case, must be a sign among us of Spirit blessing and Spirit life."⁹ Jesus' own baptism included the bestowal of the Spirit gift (Matt. 12:15-21). Theodore Jungkuntz maintains that this marks Jesus' own confirmation of his identity, mission and vocation. This was a repeatable event as Jesus experienced "reconfirmation" of who he was and his mission through various "spiritual manifestations."¹⁰ Pentecost may also be seen as the "Apostle's confirmation," as the Spirit's presence re-affirms their baptismal ministry and vocation. It too was repeatable.¹¹

⁹ Browning and Reed, 54. They quote from Paul: "You are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you: Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Rom. 8:9).

¹⁰ See Jungkuntz, 4. He states: "It would seem significant that such a 'confirmation' occurred not only once in his life and in connection with a ritual, but repeatedly. He was never 're-baptised' with water, but he was 'reconfirmed' by means of spiritual manifestations, e.g. The Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-18), in Garden of Gethesemane (Matt. 26:30-35)."

¹¹ Jungkuntz, 6, cites Acts 2:32-33 and Acts 4:5-13.

Confirmation, in this sense, was the work of the Spirit to confirm, i.e., to strengthen or establish more fully, what already existed in baptism, God's grace. This traditionally has been known as the doctrine of sanctification. Work has been done to recover the concept of Spirit gift or blessing as a way to link the process of sanctification through education to the practice of confirmation as a repeatable re-affirmation of baptismal identity and vocation.¹² Leonard Sibley defines sanctification as "the living out of baptismal faith while learning to express faith in ministry." He further suggests that

Confirmation, then, is seen as a part of the lifelong process of sanctification. It is an intensification of the catechumenate during which the person discovers by identification with the community who he is as an individual Christian and as a member of the people of God."¹³

Confirmation as a lifelong process of sanctification, reinforces the Spirit's role to strengthen our sense of communal identity and mission. Its scope goes beyond confirmation as a one time ceremony focused upon the individual's rite of passage. Rather, the Spirit "can not be confined to a single set of rituals," but remains

¹² Browning and Reed, chap. 3, "The Spirit Gift". Also see Jungkuntz, 19-20, 51-52.

¹³ Leonard Sibley, "Reaction and Discussion," in Confirmation and Education, ed. W. Kent Gilbert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969.), 127.

independent and available through out life's transitions and seasons of faith.¹⁴

Urban Holmes shares a similar perspective for the role of the Spirit in sanctification and confirmation. Holmes sees confirmation as a "rite of intensification," which signifies empowerment or strengthening, similar to the Eucharist, rather than a rite of initiation or passage, which confers status. Drawing from the research of anthropologists, Holmes argues that rites of passage are particular in nature and non-repeatable. Baptism as an initiation rite is an example of this. Rites of intensification, on the other hand, are repeatable and "related to seasonal cycles and seek to empower our environment and ourselves within it."¹⁵ As such, they are rooted in the natural order of creation and the Spirit's power to help us grow and mature in our Christian identity and vocation. Confirmation then, if limited to a rite of passage attached to the changes of puberty to adulthood, acts as a terminus to the Christian maturing process. Instead, confirmation needs to be practiced as a repeatable rite of intensification, promoting the Spirit's power for ongoing growth into the community and ministry of Christ. As such, it "celebrates not justification, but sanctification."¹⁶

¹⁴ Browning and Reed, 38.

¹⁵ Holmes, 16.

¹⁶ Holmes, 58.

The view that confirmation has always meant an ongoing strengthening of faith by the Spirit, through the Word and Sacraments, reflects Luther's theology and the principles of the Reformation. In asserting that confirmation is not the completion of a deficient baptism, the Book of Concord affirms:

Confirmation is to be seen as a sanctifying exercise of baptismal faith, which in an ongoing way works at the completion of that which God has already begun and continues in baptism....[this] requires daily acts of faith which will allow God to grant an experiential confirmation to that faith again and again until the ultimate confirmation occurs in the resurrection on the last day.¹⁷

Luther was hesitant to formalize this sanctifying exercise because of his fear that it would be used as another initiation rite or appear as something we do rather than the action of God. This also led Luther to reject confirmation as a divine sacrament and instead refer to it as a sacramental ceremony that can be repeated as the need arises. This sacramental question of confirmation remains an issue today.

A Sacrament or a Sacramental Ceremony?

Luther's concerns over considering confirmation as a sacrament are influenced not only by whether or not Christ commanded confirmation but by the Roman practice of episcopal confirmation, and how, in Luther's view, it undermined the position that baptism is complete in of

¹⁷ Jungkuntz, 52, as paraphrased from the Book of Concord.

itself and did not need any bishop to confirm what God has accomplished. To this end, Luther felt confirmation was simply being used as a means "to adorn the office of the Bishop, that they may not be entirely without work in the church."¹⁸ Luther's reaction to the Roman traditions on one hand and the Anabaptist's stress on needing a rite of personal confession on the other, shaped what some scholars believe is a rather narrow Lutheran understanding of sacrament.

Appeals have been made for a broader perspective to include the various ways in which God encounters humankind. Lutheran scholar, Leonard Sibley argues that sacrament also embodies "the preached Word, in education, in the living out of Christian vocation....In this sense everything from baptism to the funeral can be seen as having sacramental significance."¹⁹ Operating from a more open-ended definition, sacrament can refer to God's grace active throughout the ministry of the church, including confirmation.

Confirmation...has sacramental significance. It is continuous with Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism, confirmation and Holy Communion share a similar function in the nurturing of believers since they all lead to identification with the community of the faithful....[and reflects] a necessary aspect of the process by which God deals with humankind.²⁰

¹⁸ Goodwin and Groce, 207.

¹⁹ Sibley, 126.

²⁰ Sibley, 127.

Today some suggest there is a "quiet revolution" occurring regarding sacramental theology, and a movement away from a narrow substantialistic understanding toward a broader, relational perspective, in which people view God's grace as present in all authentic interactions of love, forgiveness, commitment, healing, and so on. From this broader redefinition of sacrament, confirmation can be understood and practiced as a repeatable sacrament.

To see confirmation or affirmation of baptism as a sacrament deepens the understanding and experience of the rite and preparation for it as a genuine celebration of and commitment to the reception of God's grace and guidance in the call to ministries of the body of Christ.²¹

For Lutherans to accept confirmation as a sacrament would require the re-examination of how confirmation can deepen our experience of God's grace, similar to the Eucharist, and be seen as a repeatable event to strengthen our baptismal faith and ministry. The purpose of this work is not to advocate for such a major reformulation of a Lutheran understanding of sacrament; rather my desire is to open the issue for debate, especially in regards to the ongoing need for baptismal affirmation.

An Inclusive Pastoral Ministry or

An Exclusive Ceremony?

From the findings of a recent survey posed to seven denominations, many of the new trends in confirmation pointed to the pastoral concern of relating the sacraments

²¹ Browning and Reed, 25.

(including confirmation) to the general ministry within the faith community and to the world. Browning and Reed refer to one pastor's remarks:

Our understanding of confirmation is moving much more toward being a celebration of the gift of the Holy Spirit within the community. The focus being on gift and community rather than individual.²²

Even though confirmation was still seen as an opportunity for strengthening personal commitment, the research indicates that through an emphasis on building identification with the faith community, commitment also matures. This is a shift away from the notion that confirmation is a ceremony exclusively to examine and ratify the confirmand's confession of faith. To affirm that confirmation is a "pastoral ministry....which helps the baptized....to identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission," is to recognize the inclusive and communal nature of confirmation.²³ This suggests support for a relational based program which values opportunities for building relationships both within the community and in service of its mission to the whole world. Another trend reported was that "service has become one of the strong ways of

²² Browning and Reed, 103.

²³ Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report, 1,6-8.

presenting the theme of mission."²⁴ In developing the connection between service projects and the Spirit's power to confirm baptismal ministry the inclusive nature of confirmation is reinforced.

Confirmation as the affirmation of our baptismal vocation to the world on behalf of the Body of Christ also extends the theme of grace. Confirmation can be seen as the celebration of God's free gifts: love and compassion for one another, the Spirit of wisdom and our unique talents for service. These are not entities which can be earned by passing an exam or attending a ceremony. Instead, confirmation is a life-long response to God's grace, lived out in our relationships and our commitment to ministry.

An inclusive pastoral ministry program is not just the responsibility of the pastor; it means that the priesthood of all believers must take an active role in all facets of confirmation ministry. This may involve creating a confirmation ministry team, cooperating with neighboring congregations, Lutheran or not, developing a mentor program, and certainly participation within the entire family of the confirmand. New proposals for confirmation to be an inclusive ministry depend on the encouragement of the whole faith community to participate and to expect to be

²⁴ Browning and Reed, 104.

transformed through their involvement.²⁵ Education in the purpose and theology of confirmation must be offered for laity. Then the invitation to participate will be seen as an exciting challenge for their own ministry to redefine, reshape, and practice confirmation according to the community's needs and priorities. The recommendations of the Confirmation Ministry Task Force reflect this concern toward building a broader sense of ownership for confirmation ministry. Yet, specific suggestions for implementation are needed, which is the purpose of this project (see Chapter 7).

The proposals presented in this chapter stress the need to develop a theology of confirmation which supports a lifelong process of affirming the promises of baptismal grace as well as the Spirit's gift of sanctification through the Word and sacraments. This perspective is also open to a redefinition of sacrament so it includes God's ever active grace within the community of faith and in the dynamics of service and mission to the world. Finally, I have proposed that for confirmation to be an inclusive and relational ministry it must depend upon and serve the entire community of faith, and it must be faithful to its mission of service to the world.

²⁵ Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report, 14.

CHAPTER 4

Review of Educational Understandings, Practices and Proposals

This chapter is an exploration of the role of confirmation from an educational perspective. A contrast between the historical and traditional practices and recent trends in religious education is presented. The focus is on how to interpret this contrast as a way to explore new proposals for confirmation as an educational ministry.

A Continuous Quest for Truth or An Indoctrination of Right Beliefs?

As seen in Chapter 2, confirmation has been used as a tool to assimilate people to church doctrines and traditions. The form of education was based in memorization and examination, and yet offered little to stimulate a broader approach toward learning and developing a mature faith. Instead, an indoctrination model led to a terminus of learning, suggesting that after graduation there is no further need to seek knowledge and truth.

One major new trend identified recently in the theories and practices of religious education is the movement away from an educational approach emphasizing assent or conformation to right beliefs to an approach which "interrelates beliefs and a quest for truth that can

be integrated with all of life."¹ This shift in educational approach coincides with the original intent of the catechism format, which for centuries has been the educational foundation for confirmation. Luther embraced the question and answer technique in his Small and Large Catechisms. His aim was to stimulate dialogue and provide a vehicle for interactive learning. Luther intended it to be used by the whole Christian community and for each person according to their own situation and stage of faith. Luther strongly believed that "no-one ever outgrew the need for studying the perennial challenge of the whole Christian gospel to his or her life."²

As we have seen, Erasmus had a similar concern in his development of an educational model for confirmation. However, as confirmation became regulated to the age of puberty, and became a pre-requisite for Holy Communion and full membership into the church, the educational focus shifted from a dialectical process of learning to memorization, and from an opportunity for exploration to a mode of indoctrination. Certain models of Pietism and Rationalism reinforced the need to use confirmation as instruction of correct dogma to ensure denominational loyalty.

Today, Browning and Reed believe educators are calling for a balance between instruction in core beliefs

¹ Browning and Reed, 39.

² Klos, 54.

for the purpose of identification with the community's traditions and values, and the honest inquiry of truth as an ongoing process of refinement and internalization.³ The concern is to open the instruction process so that persons are able to relate beliefs to their wider response of faith, and make decisions about these core beliefs within the framework of their everyday lives. This means much more than the provision and digestion of formulas or right answers. Rather, as an educational ministry, confirmation must focus upon the person and their needs. It must be willing to create the kind of climate where interest, dignity, integrity and mutuality are fostered.⁴ Then confirmation as a quest of truth can be considered a lifelong pilgrimage or journey rather than an abbreviated walk around the park.

John Westerhoff III maintains that it is important to connect religious education as a longlife pilgrimage to baptism and the original intention of catechesis, i.e., "the process by which we prepare persons for their baptism and the process by which we aid persons to live into their baptism."⁵ This again is the beginning of confirmation as an affirmation of baptism. Catechesis is education which

³ Browning and Reed, 40. Also see Sara Little, "Religious Education," in Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education, eds. Jack L. Seymour and Donald E. Miller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), who says: "Teaching is the process of dealing with subject matter in such a way as to enable students to assess the truth of the same in terms of their own frames of reference," 39.

⁴ Parker Palmer, To Know as We are Known (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983). See chap. 5, "To Teach is to Create a Space...."

⁵ Westerhoff, 38.

celebrates the ongoing significance of baptism as a daily source of renewal and growth. Westerhoff suggests six principles for constructing an effective catechesis program:

1. The process of catechesis is always a converting and nurturing process.
2. The process of catechesis is one of experience, reflection and action.
3. Catechesis is related to readiness and not time, to appropriateness and not a prepackaged program.
4. Catechesis is a life-style that includes our total being as thinking, feeling and willing persons. Inclusive of character, conscience and conduct.
5. Catechesis is a personal pilgrimage with companions. It is a process of journeying with another person in community, sharing a life together over the route we travel. It presupposes a searcher who is willing to let his or her life be a resource for the other, and the conviction that truth is revealed to both of them as they share in this mutual pilgrimage quest.
6. The Catechesis process is the interactive responsibility of the whole community.⁶

From my perspective, confirmation, or affirmation of baptism, practiced as a lifelong pilgrimage, is a dynamic and creative way to engage in a continuous quest for truth. I believe that Westerhoff's six principles can be used to shape curriculum designs for confirmation and promote the celebration of God's grace in baptism as a repeatable event for all seasons. The theme of seasons can also be an excellent organizing image for designing curriculum which

⁶ Westerhoff, 43-44. He also proposes four different types of catechesis: Liturgical, Moral, Spiritual, and Pastoral (pp. 75-133).

interprets the quest for truth as ever evolving and changing. I agree with Westerhoff:

The church is best understood as a story-formed community, a people on a pilgrimage through time, through seasons of profane time made holy and whole by sacred time.⁷

From an interplay between the significance of the seasons in the Church year and the seasons from birth to death, Westerhoff offers a thematic outline for a possible curriculum design:

Advent= season characterized by pregnancy, anticipation, waiting, longing and letting go, giving up control.

Christmas= season characterized by birth, celebrates possibilities. Awareness of anxiety new possibilities imply and yet lives in hope.

Epiphany= season characterized by childhood, is lived with imagination and the naive witness to the possibility of that which appears impossible.

Lent= season characterized by the adolescent struggle, makes us aware of the principalities and powers in our lives and world that distort God's dream and our journey to perfection.

Easter tide= a season characterized as a honeymoon, in which we celebrate the dream come true.

Ascension= a season characterized by adulthood, in which we are told that we are now the body of Christ and yet remain impotent.

Pentecost= season when we are made potent and are sent forth to live as a sign and witness to God's good news.

Ordinary time= a season characterized by growing old together, striving to live this Good News, day by day, until we grow weary and the vision fades, which returns us back to Advent as the time to recapture the vision and the dream.⁸

⁷ Westerhoff, 66.

⁸ Westerhoff, 67.

I have also found the theme of seasons helpful in my own attempts to design a curriculum which responds to the tension between passing on historical church traditions and allowing for an authentic search and appropriation of truth. I designed a confirmation camp curriculum entitled To Everything There is a Season.... A complete description of this program is found in Appendix C. For over eight years approximately 700 youth, ages 12 to 17 and from various Lutheran churches in Southern California, have completed this week long journey through the Church Seasons. The main focus was upon building a sense of community and create a climate for searching together. The personal interaction of study, play, meals and worship all contributed to the development of a shared meaning and experience of truth. An educational emphasis upon indoctrination tends to neglect this personal dimension and the role of the faith community being on a journey together. The need to allow and even promote curiosity and wonder are often stifled by the rigidity of doctrine presented as an end to searching.

Westerhoff, along with many other educators today, echoes this same concern:

Too often, in the name of education, we discourage searching....frequently we focus our teaching on skills or techniques and neglect sharing our lives. We tend to search for educational methods rather than the more

difficult and somewhat threatening responsibilities of revealing our innermost strivings to find the meaning of our own lives.⁹

Education must be more than the dissemination of information or correct doctrine. Rather than being passive receptacles, students must be encouraged to interact with the subject matter, the teaching community, and their own lives in order to develop and discover meaning and faith.

The fact that meaning and faith is constantly shaped and developed by the different stages or experiences of our baptismal faith reflects a second trend in religious education, namely the movement beyond a nurture model toward a faith development perspective.¹⁰ Although the nurture model emphasized growth throughout the life span, it often placed a strong focus on the significance of religious nurture during childhood and adolescence, holding to the assumption that personality formation and a sense of direction for life are crucial at these times.¹¹ The developmental perspective maintains that faith and identity are dynamic and continue to be shaped throughout adulthood.

The research of James Fowler had been instrumental in identifying six stages of faith. The final three stages of

⁹ Westerhoff, 116-17. See also Palmer, chap. 4, "What is Truth?" Palmer observes that truth is personal, relational and communal (pp. 47-68).

¹⁰ Browning and Reed, 44-45.

¹¹ Horace Bushnell, Christian Nurture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967.) Also, see Harold W. Burgess, An Invitation to Religious Education (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1975.), chap. 3. Also, see Piveteau-Dedier-Jacques and J. T. Dillion, Resurgence of Religious Education (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1977) who offer a good analysis of the Nurture Model, with particular attention to the work of Wayne Rood, John Westerhoff III and Gwen Neville.

faith development are adult. Fowler claims that deep ownership of faith seldom takes place prior to young adulthood (Stage IV, Individuative-Reflective Faith). The profound struggle between becoming committed and remaining open to how God works through the lives of all of the human family is most associated with middle adulthood (Stage V, Conjunctive Faith). The final stage of faith development is seldom reached before older adulthood (Stage VI, Universalizing Faith) and reflects a responsible faith seeking justice and love for all people in all areas of life. Fowler sees conversion experiences as "recapitulations of previous stages" and believes the developmental perspective supports religious education as a lifelong process in which several occasions for reassessment and recommitment should take place.¹²

Browning and Reed use the developmental framework to support their contention that confirmation or baptismal affirmation should be seen as a repeatable experience. They offer various suggestions for possible curriculum designs based on "natural stages of life and faith evolution." Below is a brief synopsis:

1. Infancy- Confirmation as a Part of the Unified Initiation Rite. Stress is placed on how infant baptism can provide educational experiences for parents, sponsors, the congregation and the

¹² James W. Fowler, Stages of Faith (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 290. Also see Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks, eds. Faith Development and Fowler (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1986); and Kenneth Stokes, ed., Faith Development in the Adult Life Cycle (New York: Sadlier, 1982).

child. Also, educational designs can promote "blessing" as an lifelong celebration.

2. Adolescents: Finding and Affirming a Great Fidelity. Possible Curriculum Theme: Being Blessed and Becoming a Blessing. Six main components include:

- a. Being blessed within the Body of Christ.
- b. Seeing ourselves as ministering persons and members of the blessed community, the Body of Christ.
- c. Seeing and affirming the sacredness of all of life.
- d. Becoming blessings to others in our world.
- e. Education for Spiritual Growth.
- f. Becoming Clearer About What I Believe and Why I Believe It: The Blessings of a Life of Faith.

3. Young Adults: A Time for Baptismal Affirmation Focused on Vocation. Educational emphasis upon ministry, discipleship and faithfulness in light of decision-making.

4. Middle Adults: The Need for Reassessment and Recommitment. An expansion of the catechumenal process to become as a paradigm for preparation for confirmation in mid-life is suggested, especially for those who wish deepen and re-affirm their Christian commitment. See Ross Synder's Membranes of Meaning approach to planning the second half of life.

5. Older Adults: Affirmation of Baptismal Covenant to be a Blessing. Promoting educational opportunities for the development of a "Universalizing Faith" and the revitalization of baptismal ministry.¹³

In Appendix C, I will present another example of a curriculum design which spans the life cycle, entitled Seasons of Faith. This shall rely upon the suggestions outlined above and my own parish experiments.

¹³ Browning and Reed, 109-95.

A Cooperative Relational Process or a Privatized
Authoritative Schooling?

A common factor in a confirmation model designed as a repeatable event for various stages or seasons of life is the focus upon relationships and their impact upon the development of faith. It is never a private affair, but rather the dynamic relational process of the entire faith community. The research of Browning and Reed reveals a movement away from an individualized schooling approach in Christian education toward a congregational based model, which emphasizes the importance of relationships within the educational process. Confirmation for most of this century has followed the schooling paradigm for confirmation education. The format of classes, homework assignments, recitation and examinations continues today in many cases. However, the current trend, as described by Browning and Reed is

to redesign baptismal and confirmation with a much stronger emphasis on participation within the whole life of the community of faith, in its worship, mutual ministries, and outreach to the wider world, with a view not only to individual decisions to affirm faith privately but also to affirm the power of the faith community to influence public issues in our society.¹⁴

There are a number of examples of curriculum design related to what one educator calls "relational catechesis."¹⁵ In this approach the central thrust is

¹⁴ Browning and Reed, 46.

¹⁵ Ken Smith, Six Models, 6, 28-33. He also refers to this approach as the "construction of friendship."

relationships, rather than programs or classes. The curriculum is built around possible personal encounters within the faith community and the surrounding community as a whole. Ken Smith suggests five structures for fostering relationships: mentoring program, peer counseling, the construction of friendships, the human pastor, and family catechesis.¹⁶

Approximately 1,500 congregations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America use mentoring programs as part of their confirmation education program. Although each is distinctive, the primary objective is to connect different age groups together, i.e., young people to older adults, so that faith is passed from one generation to another. In the booklet, Shared Journeys: A Mentoring Guide, a specific outline is provided, including possible guided interactions between mentor and student.¹⁷ Through the process of modeling faith and the authentic sense of caring, both knowledge of church traditions and commitment can be nurtured and developed.

Peer Counseling is a kind of single-generation mentoring program, used in addition to the primary instructor. It usually involves older students or those who have just completed a stage of confirmation (baptismal

¹⁶ Ken Smith, Six Models, 28.

¹⁷ Larry Smith, Shared Journeys: Mentoring Guide (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1993.) The outline includes: Shared Journeys of Worship, Learning, Witness, and Service. Additional exercises are Saints Sharing the Sojourn, Solitary Journey, Biblical Mentors, A Journey of Growth, A Journey of Grace and Gratitude.

affirmation), interacting with those who are currently in the program. Although, this approach has been developed primary with youth in mind, I can see value in using it for adults of all ages, pairing up those of similar age group and yet having different experiences of faith involvement.

Throughout a relational approach to confirmation the concept of friendship plays a key role. Genuine caring and a sense of belonging will make the difference to whether or not the confirmand, at any age, will continue to participate within the faith community and deepen their level of commitment. Rich Melheim, a Lutheran pastor, has developed an approach based upon this premise. He currently leads seminars entitled, "Conformation (sic) is Dead." His vision offers an alternative to the schooling system.

Information-based programs must give way to relationship-based programs. Confirmation classes must be transformed into living, learning cells. Individual service projects must be replaced by small groups of friends guided in doing acts of Christian love and compassion together... Programs built around classrooms, textbooks and 55-minute lectures must be scuttled for ones based on the relationship of one caring Christian adult playing, praying, and growing in Christ with a small group of less than a dozen students. In everything the key Christly words must be relevance, incarnation and real.¹⁸

Another key component to a relational approach is incarnational communication. The Christian understanding of the Incarnation is how God communicates the invitation to

¹⁸ Rich Melheim, "Conformation (sic) is Dead," Lutheran Partners 9, no. 4 (July/Aug. 1993): 25.

enter into a meaningful relationship. God comes in human form to be in communion with our humanity. According to Ken Smith this radically shapes the role of what he calls "the human pastor" in confirmation ministry (the focus on pastor is not meant to exclude the role of laity in confirmation education, but to offer a new model of pastor). Rather than being the authoritative figurehead for the church, distant and impersonal, the pastor must be willing to share honestly from his or her own relationship to God in order to authentically communicate and mutually experience the Incarnate Christ. Smith maintains that "the heart of the relationship between pastor and confirmand is pastoral conversation," which involves active listening, problem solving, conflict management, and the willingness to be vulnerable or human.¹⁹

The final factor in a "relational catechesis" model is the role of the family in the educational process. Luther saw the family as the ideal source for catechesis instruction. Today many believe that prospects for effective family education are slight due to the high rate of transition, mobility, economic and societal pressures.²⁰ Still, a "family catechesis" model maintains that "the

¹⁹ Ken Smith, Six Models, 32. Also, for further discussion on the role of the pastor in religious education see Robert L. Browning, ed., The Pastor as Religious Educator (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1989). For more on the role of communication in education, see Charles Foster, "Communicating: Informal Conversation in the Congregation's Education", in Congregations, ed. C. Ellis Nelson (Alanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 219-34.

²⁰ For an in-depth anaylsis on current family dynamics see "The 21st Century Family," Newsweek, special ed. Winter/Spring 1990.

learner is no longer the young person (or the individual confirmand), but the learner is the family of the young person (or confirmand).²¹

This position is well developed in Marjorie Thompson's work, who in spite of the current family dynamics argues that it is "precisely among our most intimate and abiding relationships that the character of our spiritual life is not only shaped but seriously tested and revealed for what it is."²² Thompson explores potential curriculum which are foundational to the spiritual vocation of the family and seeks ways for the church to be supportive of this vocation. Some of the themes or images she uses to convey the role of the family in spiritual formation include; Family as Storyteller, Family as Forming Center, Family as Servant, Family as Earthen Vessel, and Becoming Sacred Shelters. Her call to the church is to help its member families to

be the body of Christ within the home- to become settings where unconditional love and acceptance known; to learn and share rituals, symbols and stories of faith; to recognize and claim their special gifts and mission in the world. Then, as particular expressions of the all-inclusive family of God, church families can become redeeming communities and thus sacraments of God's grace.²³

Another potential vehicle for family education within

²¹ Ken Smith, Six Models, 32.

²² Marjorie J. Thompson, Family, the Forming Center (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1989), 13. Also see the excellent bibliography on Family and Spirituality, 139-41.

²³ Thompson, 130-31.

confirmation ministry is the traditional role of godparents or sponsors. At the time of infant baptism it is common to have the parents select godparents, who promises to act as a sponsor or supporter to the child and to the family. Why not expand upon this traditional component and initiate education for the sponsors to take an active role in the life of the confirmand throughout the various baptismal affirmation events? Just as the traditional notion of confirmation is seen as a transition into adulthood and the sponsors aid in helping the confirmand make this journey, the sponsors could, through their ongoing care, compassion and commitment play a vital role in other transition moments, such as the transition into parenthood, the transition into mid-life realities, the transition into retirement? To increase and encourage the role of sponsors could promote a broader, more inclusive understanding of family as a relational-based community.²⁴

A relational approach to confirmation is by nature cooperative in contrast to the hierarchical notion of status, or power from above, usually found in the traditional schooling model. Being cooperative means a willingness to be inclusive of others and to value the integrity of every being one encounters. Some educators say that this spirit of cooperation reflects what true

²⁴ For further discussion on the role of sponsor see Klos, 172-73; Browning and Reed, 125-26; and Elaine Ramshaw, The Godparent Book (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

spirituality is, and it marks another trend to integrate religious education and spirituality.²⁵ This view suggests fresh new images for spirituality as an affirmation of the whole person, fully alive and responsive to all of God's creation, rather than to focus on ascetic understandings of life separated from others and nature. Imagination, creativity, meditation, storytelling, artistic expression of all kinds, as well as interactive prayer all represent vital tools in promoting confirmation education as a shared spiritual journey.

Teaching, in this light, becomes most effective and rewarding if it can be done in a cooperative way, utilizing all the available resources within the congregation and the wider world community. One recommendation from the recent Confirmation Task Force in the Lutheran Church is to create or designate a "confirmation ministry team," composed of laity of all ages, parents, professional educators and pastors. One of the team's main objectives is to relate confirmation to the congregation's total ministry and mission while being reflective of the rich diversity represented by all involved.²⁶

I see a further need to create "confirmation teams" between other congregations, Lutheran and non-Lutheran alike. A cooperative model such as this would deeply

²⁵ Browning and Reed, 49-50. They cite the work of Thomas Merton and Maria Harris.

²⁶ See Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report, 11; and Browning and Reed, 105.

broaden our sense of community and spark new opportunities for the baptismal vocation of witness and service to the world. In Appendix C, I offer curriculum designs which employ a cooperative, relational approach to confirmation education. These can be used as a model for congregations who wish to move beyond the private classroom mode of confirmation.

A Lifelong Educational Ministry or
a Graduation Ceremony?

A major step in the 1969 Lutheran study of confirmation was to move away from the notion of confirmation as a singular liturgical rite and affirm confirmation as a pastoral and educational ministry. This suggested that confirmation was an ongoing activity, grounded in the baptismal vocation of witness and service to the world. The focus was on ministry, not on a system to regulate and secure the handing on of church doctrine. This shift in focus opened the door for educational reform as suddenly confirmands were perceived not merely as recipients of God's Word, Spirit and grace, but active participants in the vocation of baptismal ministry. To affirm this meant to practice it within the educational process.

This understanding of confirmation as ministry seems related to another new trend in religious education, namely

the "shared Christian praxis approach."²⁷ This model moves away from the notion of a dichotomy between theory (doctrine/faith) and practice (ministry) and away from the assumption that learning always moves from theory to practice. Instead, in a praxis model, theory and practice are seen as interrelated and interactive. Five steps or movements help to characterize how the praxis model works.

Movement 1 - Naming/ Expressing Present Action, identifying and sharing generative themes or symbols that come out of the Christian story as they interact with life, specifically the life situation of participants.

Movement 2 - Critical Reflection on Present Action, the sharing of honest responses to what has been identified and expressed.

Movement 3 - Making Accessible Christian Story and Vision, sharing of Christian story in direct relation to the issues in the naming and reflecting process. This is the invitation to develop a fresh understanding of what the story is communicating.

Movement 4 - Dialectical Hermeneutic Between the Story and the participant's stories. Invitation to enter into a dialogue with story and own experiences. Then share insights and appropriate the Christian story/vision for their own stories and self-understanding.

Movement 5 - Decision/Response for Lived Christian Faith, invitation to make decisions about their behavior and actions, based upon the experience and insights gained from the previous movements.

Educator Ken Smith offers specific examples of how this praxis model may be applied to confirmation ministry,

²⁷ Browning and Reed, 41-44, referring to Thomas Groome's model in Christian Religious Education (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980); and Sharing Faith (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1991). See also the writings of Paulo Freire who helped to introduce praxis in religious education.

especially in using Luther's Small Catechism as the text or story. Smith reiterates that this process starts with the context of the learner rather than the text and suggests that the five movements can be initiated through a simple question format: What is going on in your lives or situations which is important or difficult? What is our response to this or how are we handling this issue? What stories or parts of the catechism inform us about what we should do? What can and should we do in light of the Gospel? What options do we have? Finally, of all the options available to us, which one should we select or act upon? Smith concludes:

The usefulness of this conversational process cannot be overestimated. The five questions provide a natural framework for talking about and doing faith. It's almost like teaching young people to hold a meeting about the faith in their lives rather than teaching a class.²⁸

The praxis model offers a way to practice confirmation as an ongoing educational tool for unlocking the potential for ministry. It helps confirmands identify needs for ministry within their own situation and identify their own gifts of ministry as they decide how to respond to these needs. The criteria and curriculum for confirmation is life itself and how the Christian story, especially the gift of baptismal grace, intersects with our experience of life.

²⁸ Ken Smith, Tools for Teaching Confirmation, 16. Smith suggests four tools for utilizing this method: Ritual Pattern, Intentional Project, Shaped Human Conversion, and Shared Experience, all leading to a more comprehensive approach to confirmation as ministry.

This scope of curriculum design is much more broad, dynamic and holistic than a pre-set examination given for the sole purpose of graduation.

Confirmation education becomes very limited and static if it is only applicable to a one-time graduation format and not a lifelong process. The assumption behind the graduation ceremony approach is that if the right amount of information is digested by the learner, then he or she will be prepared to "graduate" into Christian living. This model does not take into account the reality of change and transition: for the confirmand, for the community, and even for our understanding of doctrine or traditions. This point has been outlined in the work of Mary Elizabeth Moore who proposes an alternative called "the traditioning model." Like Groome's shared praxis model, the focus is upon dynamic real-life situations which influence the learner, the teacher, the community and the traditions that the community passes on. Like the other relational models, Moore's emphasis is upon relationships, which are grounded in the past, but are influenced by future goals and aspirations, as they are acted out and reformed in the present. The traditioning model highlights the evolving nature of the person, the community and the subject matter, all playing a key role in the fluid process of education. Moore's model strengthens the argument for ongoing confirmation throughout the life cycle. On the one hand the church needs offer an educational program based in the

continuity of values and the baptismal promises. However, this program at the same time remains flexible, open to the power of transforming events, based in the realization that knowledge, commitment and faith are always changing and interrelated in the journey of life. Designs for curriculum must be interactive with the concerns and context of the teachers, the students and the entire faith community. As Moore concludes:

Curriculum, then, needs to communicate the accumulating wisdom of the Christian faith community and to create openings for persons to understand and enter more fully into the transforming power of the community's tradition.²⁹

Repeatable confirmation events and education can facilitate such "openings" for understanding and deeper participation in community life, as they affirm the transitional nature of life in general. Whether the transition is in adolescence, marriage, vocation, or even death, each occasion in human life presents another opportunity for education and the renewal of our baptismal faith. A curriculum for transitions then, would need to be contextual and adaptable, varied according to the needs of those involved as they learn anew what it means to affirm their baptism in the various faith stages of life and ministry.³⁰

²⁹ Mary Elizabeth Moore, Education for Continuity and Change (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 188.

³⁰ See Gail Ramshaw-Schmidt, "Celebrating Baptism in Stages," in Baptism and Confirmation, ed. Mark Searle (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1985), 135f. Also see Appendix C of this project.

Some argue that confirmation education, if restructured to embrace a relational, cooperative and lifelong approach, reflects Luther's principle of the priesthood of all believers and the Reformation understanding of the office of teaching.³¹ As seen in the work of Arthur Repp and Frank Klos, a case could be made that certain influences of Pietism and Rationalism led to a narrow understanding of confirmation as a time of individual decision/examination, limited to specific age groups. In this shift was a parallel shift away from the life-long catechetical process emphasized by Luther and Calvin. The Reformer's view of the teaching office was seen in relation to the entire congregation's responsibility; it flowed from the mission set forth in our baptismal vocation. At the heart of the teaching office lies three tasks:

1. the determination of the normative beliefs and practices of the church.
2. the reinterpretation of these beliefs and practices in shifting cultural and historical contexts.
3. the determination of educational institutions, processes, and curricula by which these beliefs and practices are handed down from generation to generation and appropriated in ever deeper ways across the lives of individual Christians.³²

³¹ Richard Robert Osmer, A Teachable Spirit (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990); and "Reconstructing Confirmation," Theology Today 49 (1992): 46-67.

³² Osmer, A Teachable Spirit, 46.

To recover this position is to move beyond seeing confirmation as a personal graduation ceremony to seeing confirmation as fundamentally connected to the Christian community and to the belief that all Christians are called to a vocation of service to the world. In this sense, confirmation can be seen as a commissioning for service or ministry. Confirmation education can be seen as a strengthening process for helping us live out our mission on a daily basis. Curriculum designs can enable us to respond to the issues that concern us throughout our lives; locally and globally, personally and communally.³³

Significant issues such as ecology, cultural sensitivity, alternatives to violence, hunger and economic justice could become core curriculum. Confirmation education could be an inclusive way to move us beyond merely affirming belief, toward an affirmation of our lifelong commitment and mission to service and ministry.³⁴

³³ Marc Kolden, "The Doctrine of Vocation and Confirmation Ministry," Lutheran Partners 9, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 1993) 15-19. Also for examples of possible curriculum designs see: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Journeys of Faith; and the work of Maria Harris, Portrait of Youth Ministry (New York: Paulist Press, 1981); and Fashion Me a People (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989). Harris explores Christian education related to the concept of vocation.

³⁴ Browning and Reed, 104. From their findings, "Service has become one of the strong ways of presenting the theme of mission." Some examples of possible curriculum published by the Evangelical Lutheran Church include: The Small Catechism in a Hungry World (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989); Journeys for Youth: Servant Events, Hunger/Justice Programs, High Adventure Camps (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1995); A Life

Throughout the spectrum of educational proposals for a holistic confirmation model, one more concern becomes clear, that is the need for being open to a variety of curriculum approaches.³⁵ Instead of relying on a rigid manual or one exclusive model, the future of confirmation must provide numerous possibilities for curriculum design. One approach is to offer a variety of curriculum options that can be integrated according to the conditions of the setting. William Myers suggests four "core conditions" for confirmation education based on historical understandings and current trends:

1. Witness to a Covenant, emphasis on commitment of faith and ownership of the covenant promises.
2. A Story to Tell: Tradition, the traditioning process comprised of dialogue, e.g. Catechism
3. Taking a Spiritual Journey: Pilgrimage, rely on Spiritual guides and mentors.
4. Together a Faithful Community: Ministry, focus on baptismal vocation of service.³⁶

This idea is compatible with the Lutheran Confirmation Ministry Report, in which six models are identified,

Well Spent: A Simulation Game (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991), Living in a Hungry World (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1994); The ABC's of Peacemaking (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990); and Slow and Steady Wins the Race (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1993). Also see Tom Hampson and Loretta Whalen, Tales of the Heart (New York: Friendship Press, 1991); and Albert Fritsch, Eco-Church (San Jose, Calif.: Resource Publications, 1992).

³⁵ Browning and Reed, 105. This is also recommended by the Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report, 14.

³⁶ William R. Myers, "Becoming and Belonging," in Becoming and Belonging, ed. Williams R. Myers (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1993), 14-21. Specific examples are provided for how each "condition" may help shape confirmation curriculum.

suggesting that each could be adapted or integrated according to the needs of the congregation.

1. Longer and Later. An extension of confirmation to include early childhood through high school years. Activities, spread out over many years, usually include in-home visitations, cooperative-learning groups, short courses, retreats and parental covenanting.
2. Meeting of Young People. An emphasis on conversation and learning to use the faith to think and act. Sessions are described as meetings rather than classes. Uses experiential learning and usually one to two years of intensive work.
3. The Confirming Community. A system of relationships between confirmands and other members of the faith community. Use of Mentoring and peer counseling.
4. The Catechumenal Parish. Built on historical catechumenal process and adapted to affirmation of baptism instead of sacrament of Baptism.
5. The Renewed Schools. Emphasis upon learning the Small Catechism and Scripture. Primary relationship between teacher and student, special focus on helping students grow in self-esteem.
6. Vow-Driven Catechesis. Built on vow made at the rite of confirmation, develops projects for the confirmand which are related to the vow.³⁷

The various themes or models suggested above offer a good summary of the historical, theological and educational practices and proposals for confirmation explored throughout this thesis project. In order to embrace a holistic and dynamic approach to confirmation, it is important to understand the various models from the past

³⁷ Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report, 10-11. See also Ken Smith, Six Models of Confirmation Ministry.

and the present. Then more possibilities are available and the potential for an inclusive, lifelong approach to confirmation ministry can become a future reality.

CHAPTER 5

Review of Research Inventory Responses

Purpose of Research Inventory

Is there a desire, on the part of the church, to reform the way confirmation is currently understood and practiced, particularly in light of how certain aspects of Pietism and Rationalism have influenced it over the last 200 years? This is an important question in light of the historical review in Chapter 1. What is the opinion of those who are responsible for designing and teaching confirmation? Does their position match a theology of confirmation which supports a lifelong process of affirming the promises of baptismal grace and the Spirit's gift of sanctification, as proposed in Chapter 3? Do they see the merit of adapting to a cooperative and relational model of education for confirmation? To answer these questions, pastors and lay educators who are intimately involved in confirmation ministry must be consulted. Their input and response to such questions is the focus of this chapter.

As documented in previous chapters, many theorists, such as Robert Browning and Roy Reed, Richard Robert Osmer, Ken Smith and Gail Ramshaw-Schmidt, support a model of confirmation which encourages repeatable baptismal affirmation events throughout the life cycle. The recent Task Force Report on Confirmation Ministry also maintains that affirmation of baptism is a life-long process and not a rite of passage which culminates at a specific age. The

question of this chapter is how do these perspectives and proposals for alternative models compare to the ideas of parish pastors who in most cases decide how confirmation is practiced in a congregational setting.

Method of Research Inventory

The desire for clergy feedback to a holistic model of confirmation, and the proposal of baptismal affirmation as a repeatable venture, led me to conduct a limited survey among Lutheran congregations in Southern California. The inventory I used is based upon the format in Browning and Reed's work, which allows me to compare my findings with theirs.¹

The inventory was targeted to Lutheran congregations since the focus of this work has been primarily on Lutheran practices of confirmation. Southern California was selected because I am familiar with most of the churches and pastors, and could expect a better return rate from those with whom I had already established a relationship. Out of a possible 200 Lutheran congregations in Southern California, 100 were selected and 50 responses were received. The selected group represents a good cross-section of the Lutheran congregations found in Southern California. Predominantly the churches were mid-sized (250-500 members, 70%), suburban (75%), caucasian-anglo (80%), and middle to upper-middle class (85%). The sample contains

¹ Browning and Reed, 255-57. See Appendix A for my adaptation of their inventory form.

very few from a rural settings, and in this way perhaps differs from a representative sample of Lutheran congregations throughout America.

Results of the Research Inventory

Clergy and laity alike were invited to respond to the inventory, however only one lay response was received. Out of 50 respondents 48 said the responsibility of the confirmation education program was the pastor, although 44 mentioned, in addition to the pastor, the Christian education committee, parents or the whole congregation. This indicates a trend to a broader sense of ownership and participation. Over 50 percent said they had a "confirmation team," which includes lay people, in operation. Ten did not have a "confirmation team" and eight left this question blank. Four suggested "parent partner" teams to include the whole family.

In regards to the question of whether or not confirmation should be approached as a "life-long educational program designed to provide numerous opportunities through out various stages of life to reaffirm baptismal promises" (question 5), an overwhelming number responded favorably. Only 2 respondents expressed some reluctance, wondering if the idea was very "practical." All the others were enthusiastic about a life-long proposal, sharing comments such as "Great!" "I'm all for it," "Yeah!" "It sounds like an important and viable program." Other comments included:

It's what is should be but rarely is.
It would be a wonderful way to have individuals constantly nurtured through the stages of life. Sounds good, we need opportunities to focus, evaluate and define our commitments.
Discipleship means "lifelong learning," when we stop learning we die.
I support it wholeheartedly, it is what really happens anyway. We can't do it (affirm our baptism) too often. If God be for it, who shall be against it.

The respondents were just as positive in their willingness to use a curriculum designed to facilitate a life-long learning program (question 6). Over 90 percent said they would consider implementing a resource that would provide "continuing education for the baptized." Only six respondents said they would be hesitant depending on the cost of the materials, yet they would still review it. Many agreed that it is important to find a way "to incorporate education throughout our whole life" and "enable a daily living out of our Christian faith."

When asked how the congregation might respond to the proposal of an ongoing confirmation program for all ages (question 7), one half of the respondents believed that the congregation would react very positively and welcome the new approach. About one-fourth said the response would be varied and it would require a definite "re-education" over what exactly is the purpose of confirmation. Others who felt uncertain said that a "gentle transition" would be

needed in order to incorporate a new model. Another one-fourth were doubtful that their congregation would participate in this approach because of lack of commitment, a resistance to change, and lifestyles that precluded any spare time for church programs, i.e., long commutes to work. One comment was "they might be reluctant, but with the right motivation and understanding of confirmation as a life-long process, they may want to get involved." A few others felt that the congregation would be open to an expanded definition of confirmation, but would still want to see the traditional model of a "Confirmation Sunday" for adolescents continue (see Chart 1 in Appendix B).

In response to whether or not using a life-long, holistic model of confirmation would change the way confirmation education is currently practiced (Question 8), 50% felt that it would create a new alternative to the present confirmation practice. Some respondents saw this approach as a way to practice confirmation as "a process, rather than a content-based instruction program." Confirmation would no longer be understood as a "graduation event, but an ongoing growth in faith and service." Others perceived a new freedom from not having to "crunch everything into a two year period" in a life-long approach to confirmation. The other 50 percent did not

believe this approach would mean a radical change in the current practice of confirmation, but rather "augment it" and offer additional options in how to design confirmation ministry.

In regards to using specific programs (question 10) the responses varied, many left them blank, indicating either an unfamiliarity with these programs or an uncertainty over whether they are being used.

Mentor Programs: 16 are using this program, 18 are not, 16 left it blank.

Confirmation Camp Programs: 16 participate in a Joint Confirmation Camp experience, 12 do not, and 22 left it blank.

Cooperative Approach with other churches: 16 participate in a monthly event, focused on experiential learning, 12 do not but are very interested in this idea, and 12 left it blank.

Service Project Model: 24 said they incorporate service into confirmation ministry, 4 did not, and 12 left it blank.

Parents Participation/Education Program: 33 attempt some type of parent participation or education program. Many said it needs further development and more emphasis. 10 did not, and 7 left it blank.

Active Program for Sponsors: 15 have an educational program for sponsors or attempt in some way to increase the sponsor's role in being supportive of the confirmand. 8 do not, and 27 left it blank. This reflects a considerable number left blank, indicating that many may not be familiar with this program.

In conclusion, a large majority of respondents expressed their frustration over confirmation being understood and practiced as a "graduation ceremony" and how it undermines an ongoing commitment of faith (question 12). Others felt frustrated over how to get the parents and the whole congregation to take responsibility for the confirmation program. Some of the changes and hopes for confirmation in the future included developing "a more relational approach" with an emphasis on ongoing spiritual growth within the whole community of faith. One respondent dreamed of a confirmation that could be "integrated into small groups within the congregation and inclusive of all ages." Another believed the key was to focus on "experiential learning" and allowing "more room for the Spirit to lead and guide." One respondent warned that there is often a gap between "idealistic resource materials" and "the need of curriculum that resonant with real life." Many expressed interest in a more cooperative approach to

confirmation and making use of a variety of resources, especially "people."

For a detailed presentation of the actual data and a chart which helps to summarize the results, see Appendix B.

Reflection and Interpretation of the Inventory Responses

In general, the responses from this inventory reflects dissatisfaction and concern over the current practice of confirmation ministry. The major consensus is that the traditional "graduation model" of confirmation is not working. Many feel it even undermines the life-long learning process and ongoing spiritual growth which is central to what it means to "live out the promises of our baptism on a daily basis." Out of this dissatisfaction and frustration there appears to be an overwhelming majority of clergy who are open to exploring alternative models which include the whole faith community and attempt to be relational and cooperative in content and style. There also seems to be an openness to practice confirmation ministry as repeatable events of baptismal affirmation, inclusive of all ages, according to their needs and desires. A majority of clergy would welcome resource curriculum which could implement a holistic approach to confirmation and would encourage a broader range of ownership and participation within the entire community.

The inventory responses, like the findings of Brown and Reed, indicates that reform is needed in how the church understands and practices confirmation. However, such reform may require a "gentle transition," as one respondent phrased it. Education on past confirmation practices, theological rationale, and current proposals is needed at the parish level, so that decisions made about confirmation are also inclusive. The trend to develop a "confirmation team" seems to be a healthy one. If confirmation actually became an ongoing educational tool for affirming our baptism, this team could serve a critical role in revitalizing the overall church education ministry.

In addition, responses which call for a more relational approach, integrated into the demands of real life, reflects a growing comprehension of confirmation education as ministry, rather than an instructional program. A wide majority incorporate service projects into the confirmation program and emphasize the connection between our Christian mission to the world and our baptismal vocation. Many of the definitions of confirmation included the promotion of an active faith through loving service to the world.

At the same time, a large majority of the respondents still believe that confirmation can be an essential tool

for preparation of adolescents or "young people" for a deeper commitment. I would concur with the value of a confirmation program geared to adolescents, and yet the overall results of the inventory reflects the desire and the need to explore more expansive models, despite the fact that it is not easy to move beyond the traditional model.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion and Summary

Moving Toward a Holistic Approach

Throughout this thesis I have maintained that in order to construct a confirmation program which celebrates and promotes a lifelong response to God's baptismal grace, two key presuppositions must be embraced. First, confirmation must be understood theologically as a process that is begun, rather than an action completed. Secondly, confirmation must be practiced educationally as a holistic or organic venture. This means that the various learning experiences found throughout life are connected to the overall task of education, and not approached as separate or disconnected units of learning and graduation.

As we have seen, confirmation has its theological basis in baptism. In the Patristic period of the church, confirmation was meant to convey the Spirit's role in strengthening the sustaining power of God's grace in baptism. This was to be seen as an ongoing process in the Christian pilgrimage and development of faith. However, as it became a means to confirm the individual's faith commitment, confirmation became an expansion of baptism and eventually its own separate sacrament. Emphasis was placed

on what was accomplished by the individual's vow of faith and the ritual, not on the ongoing significance of baptism.

The Reformation challenged the notion of a confirmation rite separated from baptism, and yet at the same time provided the foundation for a more significant confirmation program, which was later developed to monitor conversion, commitment, and academic excellence. As confirmation became another initiation rite and a rite of passage, the theological richness of God's grace in baptism became reduced or neglected. In addition, the role of the Spirit and the lifelong process of sanctification was no longer connected to purpose of confirmation. The vital relationship between confirmand and community, between baptismal vocation and ministry to the world was minimized.

Fortunately in the last 30 years confirmation has received considerable reconsideration. Theological concerns have been raised over making confirmation a requirement for Holy Communion and full church membership, maintaining that this practice undermines the meaning of baptism. Major studies in the purpose and practice of confirmation have been conducted throughout most church denominations. In this thesis, particular attention was given to the recommendations from various Lutheran study reports and the changes that have occurred in how confirmation is

understood and practiced in that denomination. The research by Browning and Reed indicates a growing trend across all Christian denominations to redefine confirmation as a lifelong process of affirming and celebrating what began in baptism. This means reclaiming the Spirit's role in sustaining and strengthening the faith of the whole community, and recognizing the power of the Spirit to empower us, individually and collectively, to respond to the baptismal call of service and ministry to our neighbor.

In order to enable this trend toward a lifelong affirmation of baptism, I have proposed confirmation as way to celebrate God's faithful empowerment of grace at all stages in a person's life pilgrimage. In each stage confirmation, as a repeatable affirmation of baptism, can be designed to the needs of those involved according to the various stages in faith development, the various moments of crisis or normal re-evaluation in life, or in response to how the Spirit is guiding to redefine either identity or commitment. Confirmation then, from a theological perspective, is a dynamic process of responding to the presence of the Spirit and the awareness of God's grace and love, at whatever age or stage of life.¹

¹ Browning and Reed, 72.

Confirmation, however as we have seen, is more than a theological endeavor. Through its historical roots in the catechesis process, confirmation has been practiced as an educational ministry. Faith, initiated in baptism, needs ongoing nurture through educational opportunities geared to promote an understanding of what we believe and why. This requires an approach to education that correlates faith to life experiences and allows for honest inquiry for discernment and appropriation of the truth. In this regard, confirmation education needs to be open-ended and promoted as a continuous quest for the truth.

However, historically confirmation gradually became the method for indoctrination of dogma. The educational focus has been upon the transmission of right beliefs, rather than the opportunity for widening and deepening one's understanding of the Christian faith. Eventually, confirmation education was associated with the achievement of academic proficiency and the individual's ability to complete the required schooling and exams. Public profession of faith was analogous with a graduation ceremony. This approach to education served to make confirmation a terminus in learning and has undermined the lifelong need to grow and mature throughout the stages of human and faith development.

I have proposed an educational design for confirmation that would provide "multiple experiences of strengthening in the Spirit, exploration of new understandings and celebrations of commitment."² I have called this model holistic, because it recognizes how the wide range of relationships in life plays a key role in shaping the educational process. Relationships which are inclusive of age, gender, culture and economic diversity and the rich dynamics they have to offer. Holistic can be defined as "emphasizing the organic or functional relation between parts and wholes."³ A holistic or organic approach to confirmation ministry would be relational and cooperative, recognizing and affirming the mutuality of learning between both teacher and student, and between the confirmand and the larger faith community.⁴ In this model tradition and doctrine are integrated into the experience of faith and community, which are seen as dynamic and ever-changing entities. This, in turn, is why confirmation education must be interactive for all involved and must be inclusive of all ages at all stages of life. I hope the curriculum

² Browning and Reed, 143.

³ "Holistic," Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary.

⁴ For more on an "organic" approach to education see Mary Elizabeth Moore, Teaching from the Heart. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 2-3. She calls for a passion for organic teaching and organic theology, which she defines as the way that "people are connected with themselves, with one another, with social systems, with the earth, and with transcendent reality....[living in] the web of relationships."

designs offered here will illustrate how this model of confirmation education can be a tool for holistic ministry as well.

The Future of Confirmation

The role of confirmation ministry today is in flux. The responses from the confirmation inventory supports this statement. They also reveal a gap between the vision that clergy have for confirmation and what the congregation or laity foresee. It is clear that from the clergy's point of view, reform needs to occur. As one pastor said, "the graduation model must go." A growing consensus is that, if confirmation is truly to serve the whole faith community, a model which fosters lifelong learning and continuous opportunities for baptismal affirmation is needed.

From my perspective, two major hurdles must be crossed if confirmation ministry is to change and be responsive to the current and future needs facing the church community. First, education on the historical, theological and educational dynamics of confirmation must be provided for the laity, rather than just the expectation that they will participate. Since confirmation has a history of confusion it is easy to see why laity may not have a clear understanding of how current practices have developed and therefore are unable to formulate a vision for the future.

Laity also need clear theological interpretations for the purpose of confirmation so they can enter into the dialogue and offer their own insights from faith and experience. The invitation for laity to participate in creating educational designs is also crucial. This is why I strongly support the suggestion of establishing a confirmation ministry team within each congregation and to provide opportunities for teams from various congregations to meet and share strategies.⁵ The more laity are given the chance to understand what confirmation ministry means, the more they will be able to take an active role in shaping its future and will be open to trying out new models. I believe the research offered in this project can serve to be an effective tool for education of the laity in the historical, theological and educational ramifications of confirmation ministry.

Secondly, in order for confirmation to become a lifelong, repeatable affirmation of baptism, concrete curriculum models need to be provided to the clergy so they can move forward and implement an approach and philosophy they already support. Even though for many years the Lutheran church has affirmed confirmation to be a lifelong

⁵ See Ken Smith, Planning Confirmation Ministry Events (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1994).

learning venture no specific curriculum has been designed to actualize this. Curriculum must be developed enough so it can be easily implemented without too much additional work and yet must be flexible enough so it can be adapted to specific congregational settings and respect the integrity of the confirmation teams to change it as they deem necessary. Built into these curriculum designs should be the encouragement of a cooperative, relational approach, which offers ways for confirmation ministry to be a shared responsibility, e.g., between churches, family members, congregational members, and pastors. I feel this project provides curriculum that can be translated and employed by clergy and confirmation teams.

The future of confirmation is dependent upon our commitment that Christian education and the celebration of God's grace is vital for all the baptized, not just for children or youth. Our response to God's action of calling us God's children, requires a lifetime of learning, growing and serving. Our affirmation of God's graciousness must never be regulated or reduced to a one time event. Rather, in the future, as in the past and present, God's faithfulness will be confirmed to us again and again. So, how can we not help but to celebrate this daily?

Chapter 7

Implementation of a Holistic Model

One final step remains, how can a holistic model of confirmation be implemented in a parish setting? This project would be incomplete without offering specific examples of how a lifelong program of repeatable affirmations of baptism can be approved by church councils, accepted by the laity and practiced by the whole church community, even across denominational lines. The purpose of this final chapter is to present my thesis of a holistic model for confirmation as it would appear on a church council agenda or as a proposal to a coalition of pastors who are considering alternatives to confirmation ministry, especially a more cooperative approach. The intent is to integrate theory into practice, and take an honest look at the possibilities and limitations of this model as it is interpreted and implemented. In addition, this chapter introduces the curriculum examples found in Appendix C in relation to how they might be introduced to those who are making decisions about the future of confirmation ministry in their congregation or denomination.

At a Church Council Meeting: Agenda Item #3, Motion to
Adopt a Lifelong, Holistic Model of Confirmation

Let's pretend. Recently a pastor of a mid-size Lutheran congregation attended a workshop on exploring new models for confirmation ministry. She becomes excited about a lifelong, holistic model which proposes repeatable affirmation of baptism events and ongoing educational opportunities as a way to revitalize our understanding of God's grace in baptism and deepen our commitment to the baptismal vocation of service to the world. She decides to present this model at the next church council meeting and ask for their support to implement this program. The following is an example of how this proposal might be presented and the conversation which follows:

Pastor: As most of you know last month I attended a workshop on Confirmation Ministry. I was surprised to find that a new model was being proposed as an alternative to the traditional model of confirmation which limits itself to adolescence as the primary group for education and affirmation of baptism. A case was made to broaden our understanding and practice of confirmation to include every age group and to develop a lifelong educational program to enable us to reaffirm our baptism again and again. I was impressed by the historical, theological and educational rationale that was presented for accepting this model. But, more than that, I agree with the position that our current model of confirmation is not working. It troubles me that a large majority of our confirmands see confirmation as a graduation out of the church, rather than ongoing process of commitment and faith development. The current message is that once you've finished confirmation, you're done with the church, and done with learning. I wonder if the current model of confirmation hasn't undermined our attempts to promote lifelong learning? So, with this in mind, I like to

propose that we consider implementing this new approach to confirmation, at least on a trial basis of two years and then we can evaluate it.

Church Council Member A: Wait a minute. Are you saying I need to go through confirmation again? I paid my dues. I memorized that Catechism and took tests in front of everyone. I'm not doing that again, no way.

Pastor: No, that's not what I mean by this proposal. If we look at what we use for the confirmation ceremony in our Lutheran Book of Worship, we'll see that it is called "An Affirmation of Baptism" and it is meant to celebrate God's action of grace throughout our lives. It is much more than just getting through some instruction program, it is our opportunity to affirm the promises of our baptism and renew our commitment to the ministry God has called us to in our baptism. I don't know about you, but I need to do that again and again. But I understand where you are coming from. I had to pass exams and learn all the right doctrine in order to be confirmed too. That's where this approach is different. A holistic model is a learning opportunity that would be chosen freely and not because its mandatory in order to become an adult member or anything like that. This approach is flexible and geared to meet the needs of people where-ever they may be on their faith journey. This model of confirmation is meant to serve the whole community and, in turn, must be designed by the whole community. That's why I'm glad Steve, our Parish Education chairperson also attended the workshop on confirmation ministry.

Steve: And I'm really glad I did. I've been a Lutheran all my life, went through confirmation and all, but never understood what is the purpose of confirmation, until it was spelled out for me at the workshop. I appreciated greatly the brief and concise summary of the history of confirmation, for it helped me to understand how the current model of confirmation was developed into a rite of passage for adolescents, with an emphasis placed on the personal vow of faithfulness and the need to pass exams in order to "graduate." By reclaiming the original focus of baptism, confirmation once again could mean a strengthening of the Spirit for daily living and ministry. That's why I support this new model and would like to help organize a Confirmation Ministry Team. This would include members of all ages, and their task would be to help educate the congregation on the purpose of confirmation, help design the educational programs according to various ages and

interests, and evaluate the overall program. Some may even be willing to teach or organize cooperative programs with other churches.

Church Council Member B: With other churches? What's confirmation got to do with cooperating with other churches. Don't they have their own programs geared to their own church?

Pastor: That is one of the major differences in this new model. Since we emphasize that through our baptism we share one faith, this new model builds upon the relationships which fosters learning, commitment and faith. It makes relationships central to being a faith community, eager to serve the world in a way that strengthens our common bond of mission. This model also maintains that a relational approach to learning is much more enjoyable and fulfilling than exams or memorization.

Council Member C: I like the idea of lifelong learning and finding ways to make confirmation a community-wide program, but how do we get started? It also sounds like alot of work? Is this model realistic?

Pastor: In some ways that's the beauty of this model, it relies upon more participation from the overall community of faith rather than on individual pastors or programs. Already, I have talked to other Lutheran pastors in our conference and they are more than ready to begin a monthly educational event for those enrolled in an affirmation of baptism or confirmation program. We are planning to offer monthly learning events for those in the traditional confirmation program (ages 12-16) and it then expand it to other age groups. These events are focused around a theme, such as care for the earth, alternatives to violence or prayer. We are hoping that the local Episcopal and Methodist churches will also participate. Already, I sense a spirit of cooperation between the pastors and a new enthusiasm about confirmation ministry (see Appendix C, Cooperative/Relational Model: Monthly Confirmation Events for further examples).

Council Member D: That kinda sounds like the Confirmation camp program my son attended last summer. He sure was excited about it and since then I been amazed at how eager he is to participate in other church programs, especially service opportunities.

Pastor: Yes, that's another good example of how this new model can get off the ground. For many years congregations throughout our synod have organized an annual Confirmation Camp experience. It is a wonderful example of how church doctrine and traditions can be learned through the dynamics of community and relationships. Although currently the program serves those in the traditional age group for confirmation (12-16), plans are being made to design it for all age groups. This would be another tool for making confirmation ministry more inclusive and supportive of lifelong learning (see Appendix C, Confirmation Camp Model: "To Everything There is a Season").

Church Council Member B: Alright, I can see how this cooperative approach has some promise, but what about educational programs here in our church? Doesn't there still need to be an opportunity for more in-depth study? That doesn't sound like that will happen at these monthly events. How can we provide education for those who want to relearn and reclaim what their baptism means and have it be relevant to their current life situation? This new program still sounds rather idealistic to me. Besides, if we don't make it mandatory, who is going to come? Just ask the parents of those in confirmation now, they'll tell you how hard it is to get their kids to attend.

Steve: Well, that's where the confirmation ministry team comes in. I've already talked to a number of people who would be willing to help design confirmation educational programs according to various stages of faith or life that seem to be apparent. Then people will come because the program fits their interests and needs. Just look at the response we've had to our small group ministry program. Everything from life after divorce to a spiritual approach to weight loss has attracted all sorts of people, even those who are not members of our church. Still what these groups need is a sense of cohesiveness, some way to connect them back to our baptismal faith and vocation. I see this model of confirmation a way to make a connection between life and faith. By incorporating a dimension of confirmation education into these support groups they will be linked to the wider church community and our traditions of faith.

Church Council Member E: What if the small groups don't want to become a confirmation program?

Steve: Oh, that's fine. Again, this model offers variety and flexibility, we won't want to force it on anyone. Besides, new small groups would be formed specifically for the purpose of confirmation in each context of desired learning. Such as educational events for middle age or older adulthood, geared to the faith issues which are relevant for them. Also, confirmation groups could be formed according to the various transitions in life, such as becoming a parent, losing a spouse, and so on (see Appendix C, Lifelong Learning In the Parish Model: Seasons of Faith Support Groups).

Church Council Member F: What about the high mobility factor that affects the church today. People are always coming and going, how will they be able to plug into this type of program? Things are different from the old days when members never left. What happens to those who just get started in this program and then they up and move to another city?

Steve: That's a good question. I guess it would be no problem if every church adopted this new model, and people could simply re-enter the program where they left it. However, that's where offering a variety of educational opportunities helps to address this problem of mobility. People will be able to chose the program that best fits their spiritual needs. I know, its sounds like a programmatic nightmare and a small church like ours would be fortunate to have two or three groups going, let alone one for every need or interest. But that's where the element of cooperation between churches becomes so crucial. More learning opportunities can be offered because the level of participation and responsibility is broader. This is also true of the lay ministry. In fact, this model depends upon lay participation and our baptismal claim of the priesthood of all believers. No offense, Pastor, but I believe the time has come to no longer make confirmation ministry the sole responsibility of pastors.

Pastor: I couldn't agree more. I like this new model because it takes seriously the gifts and talents of all who are in the baptized community. It says we all can teach and we all can learn, and that in itself is an affirmation of our baptism and God's inclusive and holistic grace.

Church Council Member A: O.K., I think we got your point. I'm for giving it a try, for at least a couple of years. Oh yeah, how much is this new model going to cost?

Pastor: Well, financially not any more than what we usually spend on resource guides and educational materials. In fact, perhaps even a little less, since our primary resource will be our life experiences and people to share the journey of faith. The amount of time spent and the level of commitment invested, well, that's a different story. Like most things in the church, I see this factor the biggest hurdle for this new model. Yet, from a spiritual perspective, whatever we invest will determine how much we will gain. I know, now I'm sounding like Jesus. Sorry, no sermons tonight, just a proposal.

Church Council Member A: I call for a vote on the motion to adopt this holistic, lifelong model of confirmation. All in favor say "aye."

Drawing from the conversation above, the implementation of a holistic model of confirmation might follow three possible methods: (1) The camp community program which links churches from a broader organizational network, such as a Synod or District, and could be held annually; (2) the cluster/conference community program which offers monthly experiential learning events in cooperation with local churches; and/or (3) the individual parish program, providing learning events in small groups structured according to age or interest, leading to repeatable events of baptismal affirmation. Each program can be adapted to the various stages of faith throughout the life-cycle and are interactive with each other since they share similar goals. We now turn to a description of each curriculum design. Specific examples are located in Appendix C.

Confirmation Camp Community Model

This model is based upon my experience as Dean of Confirmation Camp in Southern California, 1985-1993. One of my responsibilities was to design the curriculum for this week-long retreat geared to youth in confirmation ministry. The primary goal was to create a learning experience that incorporated the outdoor environment, stimulated an awareness of the Spirit's presence in community, and would be fun for both the students and the teachers. This is a major shift from the traditional goal of transmitting information; the purpose instead was to focus upon the dynamics of relationships and the learning experience of sharing life together.

The theme of seasons was selected for the camp curriculum. This included the connections between the traditional church seasons (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and various Saint Days), the seasons of personhood (birth, childhood, adolescence, stages of adulthood, and death), the seasons of daily life (new beginnings, change, hope, sorrow, joy, rest, activity, dreams, work and play), and the seasons of nature (winter, spring, summer and fall). This seasonal theme is reflective of how the faith of the baptized community changes and grows, while remaining grounded in core

traditions and commitments. The exact title chosen was "To Everything There is a Season," drawing from the biblical reference in Ecclesiastes, chap. 3. The intent of this confirmation camp program was to provide a learning experience that would lead through a journey of the various seasons of faith and life, and teach what affirmation of the whole baptized community means for daily living.

The Cooperative/Relational Model

This model can be implemented as monthly confirmation events coordinated between 4 to 8 local congregations. I am currently helping to organize and lead such events for youth ages 12 to 16 in confirmation ministry; however I believe that same format can also be adapted to other age groups or an intergenerational group.

This model relies upon the cooperation of pastors or lay leaders to plan and lead various learning experiences focused on a particular theme (see Appendix C for examples of themes and suggestions about how to implement these themes). These may be churches already linked together through synodical clusters or conferences, or through local ministerial associations. These events occur on a monthly basis, for two or three hours per gathering. The format could include: an opening recreation time with games ("icebreakers," i.e., games that help people to become

familiar with one another), a break for dinner/lunch, an experiential learning event, and a closing worship time. The pastors develop the theme of each event together and then take responsibility for leading one of the activities described above. The location of the event is also rotated from one church to another. The model encourages cooperation from conception to completion. This in turn builds relationships of trust and respect for each other's gifts of creativity and leadership.

The actual event is designed to be a relational encounter in which participants develop a deeper sense of community with each event. Those involved experience the dynamics of ethnic, cultural, gender, and economic diversity, in the context of sharing a spirit of Christian friendship and unity. The opportunity to interact through recreation, a meal and a time of learning shapes confirmation education to become a communal endeavor. Reinforced is the connection between belonging to the baptized community and affirming personal baptismal faith. This alternative model replaces the traditional notion that confirmation is a private affair and that faith is an individual venture. A holistic model is built on relationships within the entire community and the mutual experience of defining, affirming and living our faith.

The goal of this curriculum design is to create regular learning and fellowship events, which connects local faith communities in the mutual formation of faith and commitment throughout the stages of life.

Lifelong Learning in the Parish Model:

Seasons of Faith Support Groups

This model provides ongoing learning opportunities for confirmation education at all ages in a parish context. The curriculum is designed around various faith issues which are relevant to specific age groups or groups of people who share common life experiences, i.e., becoming new parents, divorce or separation, retirement. Educational programs rely upon the formation of faith support groups or what a Lutheran church in Minnesota calls LifeGroups.

[These are] meaningful small groups formed around real life issues and are dynamic, relevant corporate gatherings. LifeGroups may teach 'life skills/life learning,' or they might be 'life-giving' with a mission focus. They may be 'life-living' or 'life-style' oriented, organized around interests or geographic breakdown; they may be organized by life stages. They most certainly are always life-sustaining as support groups.¹

LifeGroups or faith support groups build upon the effectiveness of small group dynamics for building trust

¹ Roland Martinson, "It Takes a Village to Raise a Child," and "Life Groups Systematically Connecting Faith and Life," Changing Church Perspectives 14 (Jan. 1995): 1-9. Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Burnsville, Minn. uses a LifeGroup approach to confirmation ministry.

and intimacy. Small groups which are flexible to the needs and interests of a wide variety of people are also effective tools for attracting new people to become active in the faith community. This is because small groups offer a way for people to participate on a level that they feel comfortable and experience a sense of genuine caring.

These faith support groups vary in the duration and frequency of the program, but all share the common goal to foster an enlivened commitment to the baptismal vocation of ministry and service. Each group also concludes with an affirmation of baptism celebration during the community's worship time. The primary purpose of this life-long model of confirmation is to extend the opportunity to affirm the promises of God's grace in baptism to all stages of life. (See Appendix C for possible curriculum examples.)

Conclusion

In all three of these possible examples of a holistic confirmation model, the formation and guidance of a Confirmation Ministry Team will be crucial to implementation. This team will play a key role in making a transition to using this new approach to confirmation. It will be their job to educate the congregation regarding this model and to inspire, interpret and enact specific programs. In harmony with the spirit of the model, their

collective efforts will govern the success of moving from theory to practice and of opening the way to a lifelong celebration and affirmation of God's inclusive and holistic love expressed in the action of baptism.

In conclusion, the purpose of this holistic model of confirmation is in response to the constant need to re-affirm and re-commit ourselves to what God accomplishes, and continues to do, through the sacrament of baptism. It is not meant to be an alternative to lifelong Christian education programs which already exist. Rather, this proposal seeks to reform confirmation ministry in order to be inclusive of how God confirms and strengthens us throughout our lives. The current understanding and practice of confirmation must be broaden to include the full spectrum of life. Then, the entire community of God's faithful people will be invited to claim and celebrate the never-ending joy of baptismal ministry.

Appendix A

Confirmation Inventory*

Your Views About Confirmation

An Inventory Concerning Attitudes and Practices

Thank you for your cooperation in answering the following questions concerning what is going on in your congregation in respect to confirmation education and celebration. I am also interested in surveying how the concept of confirmation as a lifelong and repeatable event for baptismal renewal is perceived or possibly being practiced. With your permission, I intend to use responses to this survey in my Doctorate of Ministry Thesis at the School of Theology at Claremont. Please answer the questions as fully as your time permits and return the inventory to me as soon as possible. Please no later than September 20th, 1995.

Church size: (check one) 25-100.____, 100-250____, 250-500____, 500-1000____, over 1000____.

Location: rural____, urban____, suburban____, small town____.

Membership constituency (racial, ethnic, socio-economic)

1. What confirmation education and celebrations are taking place in your congregation?

For children_____

For adolescents_____

For young adults_____

For adults_____

2. What is the length of time involved (weeks, months, years)?

3. From your perspective, at what ages and stages of life would you like to see confirmation or baptismal renewal education take place?

4. What curriculum resources do you employ?

* Robert Browning and Roy Reed, Models of Confirmation and Baptismal Affirmation (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1995). This form is based on the inventory presented in this work.

5. What is your opinion about a lifelong educational program designed to provide numerous opportunities throughout various stages of life to reaffirm baptismal promises?
6. If curriculum was made available to facilitate such a program would you consider using it? Why or why not?
7. How do you perceive the congregation's response to an ongoing affirmation of baptism(confirmation) program for all ages?
8. Do you think such an approach would change how you currently practice confirmation education? Please explain.
9. Whose responsibility is the confirmation education program?
10. Are you involved in any of the following:
Confirmation Team(which includes lay people) _____
Mentor Program _____
Confirmation Camp Program _____
A Cooperative Approach(with other churches). If so, please provide specifics. _____
Service Project Model _____
Parents Participation/Education Program _____
Active Program for Sponsors _____
11. What is your definition and purpose of confirmation?
12. What are the major frustrations or problems you have experienced with confirmation or baptismal renewal?
13. What major changes would you like to see in confirmation or baptismal renewal education or celebration? Why?
- Please use enclosed envelope. Thanks again! Blessings to you in your confirmation ministry!

Appendix B
Responses to the Inventory

Number of respondents: 50

A. Church size:

25-100 - 2 100-250 - 8 250-500 - 35
500-1000 - 3 over 1000 - 2

B. Location:

rural - 0 urban - 8 suburban - 37 small town - 5

C. Membership constituency:

Racial/ethnic - 40 indicated predominately Caucasian-
anglo (over 80%); 10 indicated racially mixed,
primarily with Anglo, Hispanic, and Asian.

Socio-economic - 43 indicated predominately middle to
upper middle class (over 85%); 5 indicated middle to
lower class; 2 indicated upper class.

Question 1. Current confirmation education by age:

Children - 25 indicated yes, usually cited 1st
Communion classes and Sunday School.

Adolescents - 50 indicated yes, predominately 7th
through 9 grade.

Young Adults - 12 indicated yes, other mentioned Bible Study programs, but were uncertain if this should be considered a part of the confirmation program.

Adults - 30 indicated yes, usually in conjunction with new member classes, only 3 indicated that they used an adult catechism program linked to confirmation.

Question 2. Length of program:

31 indicated 2 years (primarily in respect to an adolescent program); 8 indicated 1 year or less
3 more than 2 years; 8 indicated on-going and length of program varied with age groups.

Question 3. Preference of age or stages of life confirmation should take place:

12 felt Jr. High (6th-9th grades) was the appropriate age; 4 Sr. High (10th-12th grades); 36 indicated that confirmation education/celebrations should be offered at all ages.

Question 4. Curriculum Resources:

26 used Augsburg (Lutheran Publishing Company) Materials, e.g., 10 - "Living in Grace," 10 "Creative Confirmation," 6 "Affirm," "New Journeys," "Living Discipleship."

24 used something other than Augsburg; e.g., 12 developed their own curriculum, 6 used Rich Melheim's

resource guide "What does it mean?" 6 used a combination of many different resources.

Question 5. Lifelong program (also see chart 1):

48 expressed support for a lifelong program.

2 expressed reluctance to be supportive.

Question 6. Would use Lifelong curriculum (see chart 1):

46 indicated they would be willing to use curriculum.

4 would be hesitant depending on the cost of materials.

Question 7. How would congregation respond (see chart 1):

25 felt congregation would respond favorably.

13 felt the response would be varied, some in favor and some opposed.

12 felt the congregation would resist such a model.

30 expressed the need for "re-education" of the purpose of confirmation, before model would be received positively.

Question 8. Would this approach change current confirmation practices:

25 believed lifelong model would create a new alternative to present confirmation practice.

25 did not believe lifelong model would change current practice, but offer additional options.

Question 9. Responsibility for Confirmation Program:

48 primarily the pastor.

2 Christian Education Committee

(44 did indicate a growing movement to include participation from a Confirmation Team, parents, and the whole congregation).

Question 10. Specific programs associated with overall confirmation ministry:

Confirmation Team 28 yes 10 no 8 no answer

4 suggested parent teams

Mentor Program 16 yes 18 no 16 no answer

Confirmation Camp Program 16 yes 12 no 22 no answer

Cooperative Approach 16 yes 12 no 12 no answer

Service Project: 24 yes 4 no 12 no answer

Parents Participation: 33 yes 10 no 7 no answer

Sponsor Program: 15 yes 8 no 27 no answer

Question 11. Definition and purpose of confirmation:

19 opportunity through education and worship celebration to affirm baptismal promises and renewal of faith, to develop spiritually.

18 to increase participation and commitment within church community (ownership of traditions, service).

13 to renew and strengthen one's relationship to God.

(20 indicated that a main focus of confirmation was preparing youth or young people to make a deeper faith commitment, 30 indicated that confirmation was for all ages).

Question 12. Major frustrations:

14 Fighting the "graduation model," education and commitment drops after confirmation is completed.

12 Keeping students interested and involved, making program relevant to their needs.

14 Lack of commitment from parents, difficulty of scheduling classes and lack of attendance.

10 Lack of commitment to and ownership of confirmation program by whole congregation, deemed pastor's responsibility. Lack of understanding by laity on what is the purpose of confirmation.

Question 13. Suggested changes:

12 Incorporate a lifelong model, offer many opportunities to affirm baptismal promises.

16 Integrate confirmation program into whole life of congregation, use confirmation teams, use small group approach for all ages, further parent participation.

16 New curriculum needed, stress creative and experiential learning, cooperative approach with other churches, have joint confirmation events, make faith relevant to needs of confirmands.

2 Begin program earlier.

4 Not sure or no answer

Below is a chart which helps to quickly summarize what I see are the most significant results of this inventory.

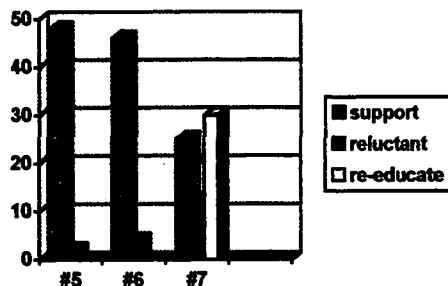


Chart 1

This chart helps to summarize the some of the major findings of this research inventory. In response to questions 5, 6, and 7 an overwhelming number of pastors expressed their support of a lifelong educational confirmation program and would consider using curriculum designed to facilitate this program. Only 2 were reluctant to offer their support and only 4 were reluctant to use the curriculum, primarily due to the possible additional expense. When the pastors were asked how they felt the congregation would respond, in question 7, a slight majority said that their congregation would be supportive of a lifelong approach to confirmation. Only 12 felt that their congregation would be reluctant to offer their support. It is interesting to note that another majority of pastors (30), expressed the need for re-education of the purpose of confirmation, before the model would be supported.

Appendix C

Examples of Proposed Curriculum

Confirmation Camp Model: "To Everything

There is a Season"

This basic format includes confirmation students, their pastors or a lay leader from each congregation and camp counselors (most were college students employed by the camping program, an intentional effort was made to select a broad representation of cultural and ethnic diversity, some even came from other countries). The total of participants can range from 65 to 125, depending on the capacity of the retreat center and the scope of leadership.

Small groups of the confirmands, pastors and counselors are formed, called "congregations." This group meets twice a day to explore the daily themes more intensively. They also create an opportunity for bonding. Two teachers or spiritual guides (either pastors or lay leaders) are assigned to a congregation. They are given the freedom and encouragement to develop the daily themes as they see fit, however it needs to be stressed that they are to use an experiential, imaginative approach that draws upon the setting, the experience of the confirmands and teachers, and the interplay of the community.¹ This cooperative approach guides the whole learning process.

¹ Examples of this approach are found in the work of Jerome Berryman, Godly Play (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); and Maria Harris, Teaching and Religious Imagination (New York: HarperCollins, 1987). Other key resources include Youthsources

The daily themes include the seasons of the church year and related seasonal life themes, which could be interchangeable. Below is the basic curriculum framework;

<u>Day</u>	<u>Church Season</u>	<u>Events</u>	<u>Other related Life Themes</u>
Sunday	Advent	The Prophets, John the Baptist, Mary's experience	Hope, Journeys, Announcements Vision, Dreams, Longing Beginnings, Questions
Monday	Christmas	The Birth Narrative	Joy, Fulfillment, Celebration Birth, Change, Transformation
Tues.	Epiphany/ Lent	Wise Men, Baptism of Jesus, Miracles and Teachings, Wilderness Experience, road to cross	Awakening, Illumination, Understanding, Searching, Repentance, Brokenness, Injustice, suffering, despair, evil, sin, power
Wed.	Holy Week/ Easter	Passion Passover, Exodus, Easter Narrative	Pain, loneliness, alienation death, love, restored hope, liberation, joy, living
Thurs.	Pentecost/ Saint Days	Spirit gift Church Community, People, Stories of Inspiration	Relationships, Belonging, unity, transition, mission, diversity, global/personal concerns, responsibilities
Fri.	Ascension/ Transfiguration Other Feast Days	Jesus' Departure, future promises, glory and fulfillment	endings, good-byes, futures fears, hopes, faith, trust, heaven, home, challenges

books by Youth Specialities, El Cajon, Calif., published by Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Mich.; New Games Foundation, San Francisco, New Games and More New Games (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974, 1981); and Jeanne Gibbs, Tribes: A New Way of Learning Together (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Center Source Publications, 1994).

An effort should be made to connect the small group's exploration of these themes with the whole community each evening. Community events can include:

1. Old-fashioned Christmas Party in which each group offers a special gift to the whole community, e.g., a song, a skit (such as a re-enactment of Los Posadas), or make Christmas cookies or a piñata filled with acorns, a symbol for new life.

2. Lenten Pilgrimage to various parts of the world and the experience an imaginative global encounter; learning a native song, craft and story. After each encounter, the small groups return to whole group for a time of sharing their experiences.

3. Easter Square Dance, complete with professional caller.

4. Pentecost No-Talent Show, and let out the Spirit's "hot air" in us all.

The effectiveness of this approach can be measured by the enthusiasm of the confirmands and their desire to remain after the week concluded. The success is also seen in the sense of community and authentic relationships which are constructed during the week, and how this can generate a greater sense of involvement and commitment from the confirmands within their home congregations.

Although, in my experience, this model was used for youth in confirmation programs, I believe that it could be implemented for children and adults of all ages as well.

This approach could be especially helpful for those who are new to the church or in the process of re-entry and want to affirm their baptismal faith.

This model could also be adapted to include congregations from many different denominations (besides Lutheran) since the theme of seasons is so broad and inclusive.² The planning of such an event helps to build community as much as the event itself, especially when the model is relational and cooperative in nature.

² The theme of seasons is also conducive to the wide assortment of resources which are available. For example, for the season of Christmas I suggest the annual publication of "Whose Birthday is it Anyway?" by Alternatives, P.O. Box 429, Ellenwood, Ga. 30049; The Martin Luther Christmas Book, translated and arranged by Roland H. Bainton (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); La Posada: A Bilingual Christmas Service, ed. Jennifer Fast (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987); and Ann Weems, Kneeling in Bethlehem (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980). For Lent, Holy Week and Easter see The Martin Luther Easter Book, translated and arranged by Roland H. Bainton (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); Mary Hughes, A Lenten Place (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); Debbie Trafton O'Neal, An Easter People (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986); "Learning to Live by God's Truth: A Packet for Lent and Easter" by Alternatives; and Ann Weems, Kneeling at Jerusalem (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

Cooperative/Relational Model:

Monthly Confirmation Events

Below are various examples of themes that can be used in the monthly confirmation event programs. Included are suggestions and resources that can help to make the confirmation event a relational and communal learning experience:

Theme: "Being the Body of Christ" Use for Pentecost Sun. Begin with a number of games for building trust, e.g., Knots, Lap Game.¹ These games help to promote a spirit of cooperation and ease the normal apprehension that comes from doing interactive exercises. Continue with "The Balloon Game," in which small groups are organized and given the task of moving from one side of the room to the other, while keeping a balloon afloat. Also various changes are made in the group structure (e.g., all must hold hands or only half the group is instructed to participate).²

Later discuss what the members of the small group experience during this game. Perhaps some felt a sense of unity or while others frustration? Why? Examine possible

¹ New Game Foundation, New Games (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974); and More New Games (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981).

² See Richard Reichert, Simulation Games for Religious Education (Winona, Minn: St. Mary's Press, 1975). This is a good introduction to the use of simulation games, and offers games for basic theology, community, nature of prayer, and moral problems.

parallels to the experience of the church community. Then act out the skit "The Body-Life," based on 1 Corinthians 12.³ Then each group constructs a body, by drawing each other's hands and feet and placing them together in a way to form a person's body. Discuss what it means to be a body, both personally and cooperatively. Also discuss what it is like to be sick in our bodies. Read story, David has AIDS⁴ and reflect on how his community responded to him and how do we respond to those with AIDS and other illnesses.

A possible follow-up project is to write letters or visit those in a local AIDS Hospice Center. Follow-up projects are suggested assignments for the confirmation groups in each congregation to complete at a later time.

Theme: "What Shall We Do With Jesus?"⁵ A Modern Day Passion Play. For Palm (or Passion) Sunday. First watch the crucifixion scene from the video version of "Jesus of Nazareth." Then divide up into four "gangs" of power; The Saddes (the Sadducees), The Scripts (the

³ See Wayne Rice and Mike Yaconelli, Greatest Skits on Earth, Volume 2, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/YouthSpecialities/YouthSource, 1987).

⁴ David Has AIDS, In our Neighborhood Series (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah, 1989).

⁵ This was based on a simulation game with the same title in Donald Miller's Using Biblical Simulations (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1973). Considerable revision was done to make it contemporary.

Pharisees), the Rowdies (the Herodians) and The Future Bloods (the Apocalypticists). Each group selected a leader.

Then discuss their opinion about Jesus and what they should do to him. Once the group comes to a consensus, they then develop a strategy for how they will argue their opinion at a gang summit meeting and win the other gangs over to their side. The four gangs then meet for an open hearing and to vote upon whether Jesus should be put to death or set free. The representative leaders speak first and then select others to speak for the group. Each group is given a time limit for presenting their case. Some surprise guests arrive to speak on behalf of Jesus; including Mary, Jesus' mother, the blind man who was healed, and finally Jesus himself is brought before the gangs (some of the pastors or lay leaders help to play the various roles of the surprise guests). Conclude with a secret ballot and announce the verdict. Then, return to small groups to debrief. Possible questions that can be used are:

How did it feel to be part of a gang? Who seemed to have the power? How do you feel about the verdict? Do you think Jesus' death could have been avoided? How? How can gang violence be avoided? Is there any hope? How can we, as followers of Christ, make a difference?

A follow-up project could include further discussion

on gangs and the nature of violence. How can gang pressure lead to violence? How are hatred, fear, prejudice, and the need for power related to violence? For youth, read and discuss Dana Doesn't Like Guns Anymore⁶. For adults, read and discuss Engaging the Powers, chapter 14, "The Acid Test: Loving Our Enemies."⁷ Also, pretend that members of your group have been elected to the local city council. What programs could be developed to offer an alternative to gangs? Record suggestions and actually attend the next city council meeting and present them. Also, send your suggestions to the local newspaper to be printed under letters to the editor, or local community news.

For more information contact; Alternatives to Violence, (315/453-7311), Confronting Violence in our Communities, (203/928-2616), and Fellowship of Reconciliation, P.O. Box 271, N.Y., N.Y. 10960, which offers training in non-violence.

⁶ Carole Moore-Slater, Dana Doesn't Like Guns Anymore (New York: Friendship Press, 1992).

⁷ Walter Wink, Engaging the Powers (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 263-77.

Theme: "Sharing in God's Creation: What is Eco-Stewardship?" For Earth Day Sunday in April.

For this event meet at a local botanical garden (a nature preserve or a quiet park would also work). Begin by dividing into small groups and going on a nature hunt, e.g., a list of natural items to see, touch, hear or taste. At one point in the hunt, the group can play the "tree game." Partners team up, one is blindfolded and led to a tree. The person then explores the tree for its uniqueness, touching the leaves, feeling the texture of the bark, hugging the tree for size, and checking the surrounding area. Then they return to the starting point, remove the blindfold and see if the person who was blindfolded can find their "tree." Each partner takes a turn.⁸

Then regroup and share results of the nature hunt and the experience of beholding the world's wonders. Then two surprise guest appearances are made by Francis of Assisi and Teresa of Avila. They share stories and lead the group in a guided meditation in "creation spirituality."⁹

⁸ See Joseph Cornell, Sharing Nature with Children (Neveda City, Calif.: Amanda Publications, 1979); and Adrene Katz, Naturewatch (Menlo Park, Calif.: Addison-Wesley: 1986).

⁹ See Rosemary Broughton, Praying with Teresa of Avila (Winona, Minn.: St. Mary's Press, 1990); and John D. Bohrer and Joseph Stoutzenberger, Praying with Francis of Assisi (Winona, Minn: St. Mary's Press, 1990). The entire "Companions for the Journey" series is excellent.

Then discuss what it means to be responsible stewards or caretakers of the earth. Close with reading "A Litany of the Circle" by Chief Seattle¹⁰ and join together in making a pledge to care for the earth.¹¹

A follow project is to play the game "Behold" which offers an interactive and fun way to evaluate one's lifestyle in light of ecological concerns and to consider possible changes and further actions.¹²

Theme: "Who was Martin Luther and Why Should I care?"

Start with a dramatic presentation to introduce Luther and the primary characters of the Reformation. This includes brief dialogue encounters between Luther and Erasmus, the Radicals, Melancthon and finally his wife Katie. Confirmants are instructed to listen carefully, for a question and answer game based on the information will follow. The group is divided into four teams to play a loose rendition of the t.v. show "Family Feud." Multiple choice or true/false questions are asked about Luther and the Reformation. Prizes are awarded to the first and second place teams, although

¹⁰ See Hampson and Whalen, 20.

¹¹ We used "Earth Commitment" from Fritsch, 87.

¹² John R. Seraphine, Behold (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991). For more action ideas, see Fritsch.

everyone receives something since the game is based upon grace. It is amazing to see how much information the participants absorb using this "playful" approach to learning.

Conclude with the Lord's Prayer and Luther's understanding from the Small Catechism, read aloud in parts.

A follow-up project could include playing the Lutheran Edition of Bible Learning Game.¹³ Also consider conducting a survey from local Catholic churches on their current impression of Luther and his impact on the church. Plan a joint Reformation worship and fellowship event that is inclusive and celebrates our common bond of God's grace.

Theme: "The least of mine...seeing the face of Christ"

Begin with a dramatic reading of Matthew 25:31-46 and then led the group in a Welfare Simulation experience.¹⁴ Participants form families of varying sizes and situations, each receives a packet of food stamp vouchers, transportation vouchers, money and

¹³ Lutheran Edition of the Bible Learning Game (St. Louis: Creative Communications for the Parish, 1991). Call 800/325-9414.

¹⁴ Welfare Simulation Kit (St. Louis: ROWEL Education Association, 1990). Call 314/361-6665.

other necessities, plus a description of their situation.

A bell starts the first of 15-minute "weeks." Families approach tables representing services such as the food stamp office, grocery store and the church. The experience helps to sensitize participants toward the dynamics of poverty. After the stimulation is over small groups are formed to discuss the experience. Close with poetry written by children and adults who have experienced living in a local homeless shelter and biblical other selections.

Follow up projects could include serving at a local soup kitchen, heading up a food and clothing drive or becoming involved in advocacy for funding for a shelter program within the community. Poetry and stories from those living at a transitional shelter could be collected and arranged in book form. Confirmands could add their own poetry or reflections on the whole issue of economic justice.

Lifelong Learning in the Parish Model:

Seasons of Faith Support Groups

Below are specific examples of curriculum for designing a lifelong learning model in a congregation setting, using the small group format organized around various stages of faith or common themes/transitions throughout the life cycle and repeatable baptismal affirmation events:

1. Life Event: Pre-Birth and the Blessing of Parenthood.

Confirmands: "Expectant" parents.

Class Length: One year

Seasonal Theme: Advent narratives; story of Mary and Joseph as expectant parents, the story of the angel's visit and Mary's song, the Mary and Elizabeth story.

Faith issues: Anticipation, expectancy, fear of the unknown, trust, facing transition physically, emotionally, spiritually.

Events: a). In home visitation by pastor and/or lay ministers. Provide guided meditation upon the Advent narratives and how they help interpret this new beginning of opportunity to share hopes, dreams, fears.
b). Participate in a Faith Group, twice before birth. Focus on family rituals associated with anticipated birth: selecting a name, prenatal care, preparation in becoming "priests" to their child, selection of godparents/sponsors. Offer opportunities to share expectations in light of their own faith pilgrimage. Faith group can include other expectant parents, sponsors, other church members of various ages who have experienced parenthood and want to offer their support and, if appropriate, professional counselors trained in this field. Session concludes with time of prayer and worship.
c). Visit a local adoption agency, examine and discuss the expectations of parenthood as set forth in their policies. Explore ways for parents to be supportive

of advocacy programs for children in general, i.e., The Children's Defense Fund.¹

d). Sometime prior to birth, have an affirmation of baptism event within context of worshipping community. Focus will be upon the blessing of parenthood and how the promises of baptism can strengthen our ability to be loving and caring parents. Expectant parents receive laying on of hands to confirm Spirit's gift of forgiveness and grace, which will inspire them to be channels of God's blessing to the child. Also, they will receive the prayers of the community, as a symbol of the love and support that surrounds them within the faith community who are with them on this pilgrimage and new venture of faith.²

2. Life Events: Birth and Baptism/Confirmation as a part of the Unified Initiation Event.

Confirmands: Newborn and parents, sponsors.

Class Length: Six Months

Seasonal Themes: Christmas and Epiphany narratives.

Jesus' birth and baptism. Story of Simeon and Anna.

Faith Issues: See James Fowler's Stages of Faith (1981). (Primal stage of faith) New beginnings, joy, fulfillment, transformation, transition into new responsibilities and challenges.

Events: a). Make a pastoral visit to hospital or home. Provide guided meditation on birth narrative. Take time for blessing the new child and offer prayers for parents.

b). Participation in Faith Group geared for baptismal instruction. One session for parents, guardians, and sponsors. Selected lay members also attend. Focus upon how the whole community is involved in the event of baptism and the preparation which is required. Discuss baptism as a life-long process of God's grace through scripture and personal stories.³ Give special attention to the lifelong role of the

¹ See Welcome the Child (Washington D.C.: Children's Defense Fund Publications, 1992). 202/628-8787.

² Browning and Reed, 116-17.

³ Resources include: Barbara Knutson, Welcome to the Lord's Family (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984) that explores an intergenerational model to baptismal instruction; Margart Spencer, Preparing Parents for Baptism of Their Children (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 1986); Gail Ramshaw-Schmidt, "Celebrating Baptism in Stages" in Baptism and Confirmation; and Betty McLaney, Beginning a Journey (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Publishing House, 1988).

sponsors or godparents, specifically in regard to future affirmation of baptism events.⁴

c). Actual Baptism event, an opportunity for the whole congregation to affirm the promises of baptism.⁵

3. Life Event: Childhood and Affirmation of Baptism
Confirmands: 2-5 years old, 6-8 years old, 9-12 years old.

Length of class: One year for each age group.

Seasonal Themes: Epiphany. Jesus' ministry and teaching, parables and encounters.

Faith Issues: (Mythic-literal stage of faith) Baptismal identity as God's child, belonging and becoming, experiencing God (Jesus), friendship, sharing, and growing awareness and exploration.

Events: a). Discuss parables which accent God's grace, forgiveness and love. In Faith groups construct experiential or "playful" learning times, shaped to allow participants to enter into the story together and respond to it however they wish. Focus on enjoyment and creativity inherent in children.⁶ The collected expressions of playful learning could become the classes joint affirmation of baptism and shared at a worship celebration. In this model, the learning is a mutual venture between adults and children, based on creative wonder and shared insights.

b). Offer a workshop event on childhood spirituality for parents and sponsors. Use experiential ("godly play") approach to help parents be aware of their own childhood encounter of God. Focus on sharing their baptismal stories of God's grace throughout their lives and allow them to express this in a variety of ways.⁷

c). Encourage children to design their own affirmation of baptism celebration. Perhaps it will be a dramatic presentation of a story or dream, a song, or artwork. The focus is promoting a sense of "owning

⁴ See Ron Lewinski, Guide for Sponsors (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1987); and Ramshaw, The Godparent Book.

⁵ Browning and Reed, 211-21. Examples of possible liturgies are offered.

⁶ See Berryman, chap. 7; and Sofia Cavaletti, The Religious Potential of the Child (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992).

⁷ This suggestion is inspired by the work of Edward Robinson, The Original Vision (New York: Seabury Press, 1977).

of one's own faith" rather than reducing confirmation to a conforming pattern.⁸

d). Service project events, which promote the baptismal vocation of ministry and service, for children 4 and above can also be meaningful; such as visiting a nursing home on a regular basis, sharing songs and skits, being involved in a recycling program and creation stewardship or participating in a walk-a-thon against hunger.

4. Life Event: Adolescence

Confirmands: Ages 12-18

**Length of Program: 2 years (for ages 13-15)
2 years (for ages 17-18)**

Seasonal Themes: Lent, time of struggle and trial, Jesus' wilderness experience and passion. Easter, a time of renewed hope and transformation. The Resurrection narratives.

Faith Issues: (Synthetic-Conventional stage of faith). Awareness of suffering and injustice. Searching for own identity and experience of a triumphant and accepting love.

Events: a). Through Faith groups offer relational and interactive learning events that create opportunity for community building between students, teachers and the world (see previous curriculum examples in this appendix). For example, take class to a "birthing center" or maternity ward at the local hospital. Interview a new parent or staff on what is like to see a baby be born. Read description of Jesus' birth. Then take class to mortuary. Interview staff on what it is like to work with death. Read description of Jesus' death. Have students write their own birth announcement or obituary. Share with group or a partner.
b). For the holidays take the class to the grocery store and pass out gifts (i.e., placemats for Thanksgiving, Advent calendars/small wreaths for Christmas, colored eggs for Easter, flowers for May Day). Reflect upon the responses they receive. Discuss how they receive and give the free gifts of God; love, forgiveness, grace. Share insights with the faith community at worship, or through the church newsletter.

⁸ Browning and Reed, 133. Also see pp. 222-30 for a liturgical example.

c). Use themes of Covenanting, Experiencing Tradition, Pilgrimage, and Ministry to shape an integrative approach to confirmation education.⁹

4. Life Theme: Young Adult

Confirmands: Ages 19-34

Length of Program: Ongoing opportunities offered, participate as desire; affirmation of baptism events scheduled twice a year and at all baptism celebrations.

Seasonal Theme: Pentecost, Gifts of the Spirit and the Mission/Vocation of God's people.

Faith Issues: (Individuative-reflective faith) Vocational and personal identity/values in tension with community identity/values. Need to critique one's faith, and develop interdependence between personal and social realities, between unity and diversity. Search for mission and meaningful relationships in midst of transition.

Educational Events:

a). Begin Faith group focused on dialogue around ethical concerns and decision-making. Use current news stories, talk shows, films as a springboard into shared conversation and personal discourse.¹⁰ Create safe environment for honest disclosure. Key questions; How does one interpret and live out a faith commitment in relation to moral issues? How does stories from scripture and tradition offer insight and inspiration?¹¹ These faith groups could be expanded

through the use of communication technology, via the "internet" to include other young adults (or experts in the field) in communities different than their own.

b). Basic training events for ministry, confirmation is seen as a commissioning event. Emphasis on baptismal vocation of service and the Spirit's gift of talents for mission. Training includes a vision of what is involved, goals of ministry, learning process of decision-making and some fundamental ministry skills (listening, consulting, giving

⁹ Myers, pp. 14-21. Many specific learning experiences are provided under these four themes with adolescence in mind.

¹⁰ Browning and Reed, 164-65. Thomas Groome's dialogical model is suggested as an example.

¹¹ Some examples of possible curriculum resources include: Daniel Erlander, By Faith Alone (Chelan, Wash: Holden Village, 1983); Walter Altman, Luther and Liberation (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); Tending the Garden ed. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987).

feedback, conflict resolution, strategizing for change in personal and cooperate life) and a conviction that the learning process is ongoing.¹² The focus helps to interpret one's daily occupation and career choices as an arena for ministry.¹³ Another resource is Stephen Ministries, a program geared to train lay persons to minister with persons of special needs: the hospitalized, the terminally ill, those in job crisis, those who are disabled, those affected by chemical or alcohol dependency and many others.¹⁴ In each case, the training or confirmation education could be followed by an affirmation of baptism celebration.¹⁵

5. Life Event: Middle Age Adulthood

Confirmants: Ages 35-55.

Length of Program: Will vary according to needs of participants and the focus of program.

Seasonal Theme: The Ordinary time of Pentecost and Saint Days, faithful discipleship within a broader sense of community. Learning from the saints and one's own past.

Faith Issues (Conjunctive Stage of Faith, although faith stage fluctuates between previous stages). Dealing with paradoxical nature of life and faith, Experience of turmoil in midst of stability. Growing awareness of mortality and aging process, a time of reassessment and recommitment.

Educational Events:

a). Form faith groups around various issues of concern for this age group; taking care of an aging parent, death of parent, divorce, blended families. Create an environment for honest dialogue between group participants and life-stories of people in scripture and saints, both past and present. Encourage seeing faith as a response to crisis and reassessment as a tool for nurturing spiritual depth.¹⁶ A special focus

¹² Browning and Reed, 167. They cite the work of John and Adrienne Carr in developing a core curriculum for the ministry of the laity, The Pilgrimage Project (Nashville: Upper Room, 1987).

¹³ See William E. Diehl, In Search of Faithfulness (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); and an earlier book, Thank God, It's Monday (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

¹⁴ Kenneth C. Haugk, Christian Caregiving (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984) or write Stephen Ministries, 8016 Dale St., St. Louis, Mo. 63117-1449.

¹⁵ Browning and Reed, 232-34.

¹⁶ See the Companions for the Journey series by St. Mary's Press, Winona, Minnesota which includes "saints" such as Dorothy

could be on prayer-life; the communication of God's word and baptismal imagination as a way of "seeing life through the prism of baptism and commitment."¹⁷

b). Use the catechumenal process as a paradigm for preparation for confirmation in mid-life. The historic model now is widen to include; persons baptized as infants who want to make mature public affirmation of faith, persons seeking out the church for marriage or baptism of a child, newcomers from other churches or those returning to the church after being away for many years, and active members seeking to deepen their commitment.¹⁸

c). Offer interactive activities for developing a faith history and a faith vision, both personal and cooperate. Make a tapestry in which separate pieces can be interwoven as one. Explore ways to extend the "loving covering" of God's grace to the wider community through advocacy and service.¹⁹

6. Life Event: Older Adulthood

Confirmants: 56 and older

Length of Program: Varies according to the needs of participants and the focus of the program.

Seasonal Theme: Ascension, Transfiguration and Other Feast Days; i.e., All Saints Day.

Faith Issues: (Universalizing Faith Stage) endings and new beginnings, farewells, death and aging, hope and fear, wisdom, revitalized sense of ministry, new understanding of vocation in midst of "retirement."

Educational Events: a). Offer a Faith Group around

Day, Thomas Merton, Francis of Assisi, Hildegard of Bingen, and Catherine of Siena.

¹⁷ Walter Brueggemann, Finally Comes the Poet (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 84-90. A curriculum resource is his work Praying the Psalms (Winona, Minn: St. Mary's Press, 1982).

¹⁸ Browning and Reed, 177-79. For an example of Luther's Small Catechism tailored to these needs see Steven McKinley, I'm Glad You Asked! (Philadelphia: Parish Life Press, 1987); and Daniel Erlander, Baptized We Live (Chelan, Wash: Holden Village, 1983).

¹⁹ Browning and Reed, 179-81. They cite the work of Ross and Martha Synder, Theory and Documentation (San Rafael, Calif.: Institute for Meaning Formations, 1986). Also for further resources see Martha Whitmore Hickman, The Growing Season (Nashville: Upper Room, 1980); and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James D. Whitehead, Seasons of Strength (Winona, Minn: St. Mary's Press, 1985).

the central issue for older adults, "What will I do with the life that is left to me?"²⁰

Match community resources and opportunities for ministry to the gifts and needs of participants. As a reflection/discussion guide use resources geared to theme of aging and our baptismal vocation of ministry and caring.²¹

b). Begin a peer-counseling program in which volunteers are trained to offer counseling, guidance and support to other older adults in times of transition or crisis, e.g., death of a spouse, prolonged illness, retirement.²²

c). Allow older adults to design and take responsibility for their own educational programs.²³

For each educational event, include an affirmation of baptism celebration within the context of the worshipping community.²⁴

²⁰ Browning and Reed, 182. They cite the work of Arthur Becker, Ministry with Older Persons (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986). This resource offers many excellent educational models.

²¹ Some suggestions are Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, Everything to Gain (New York: Random House, 1987); and When I am an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple, ed. Sandra Haldeman Martz, (Watsonville, Calif.: Papier-Mache, 1987).

²² See Browning and Reed for their description of Shepherd Centers and a Covenant Community, 192-93.

²³ See Sara and Richard Reichart, In Wisdom and the Spirit (New York: Paulist Press, 1976).

²⁴ For liturgical formats with older and retirement-age adults see Browning and Reed, 242-46.

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